

LA VIE
ET
LES CRIMES
DE
ROBESPIERRE,
SURNOMMÉ LE TYRAN;
DEPUIS SA NAISSANCE JUSQU'A SA MORT.

8

Ouvrage DEDIE à Ceux qui commandent, et
à Ceux qui obéissent.

PAR

M. LE BLOND DE NEUVÉGLISE,

Colonel d'Infanterie légère
Abbe Bray

Le Bonheur fuit la Terre où commande le Crime. P. C. 19267

à l'usage de la



Devise

A A U G S B O U R G,

Chez tous les Libraires; et dans les principales
Villes de l'Allemagne.

M. DCC. XCV.

Avec Approbation.

THE EARLIEST LIFE OF ROBESPIERRE

Title-page, from a copy in the author's possession

ROBESPIERRE

By J. M. THOMPSON

*Fellow of Magdalen College Oxford
University Lecturer in Modern French History*

VOLUME I

*From the Birth of Robespierre
to the Death of Louis XVI*

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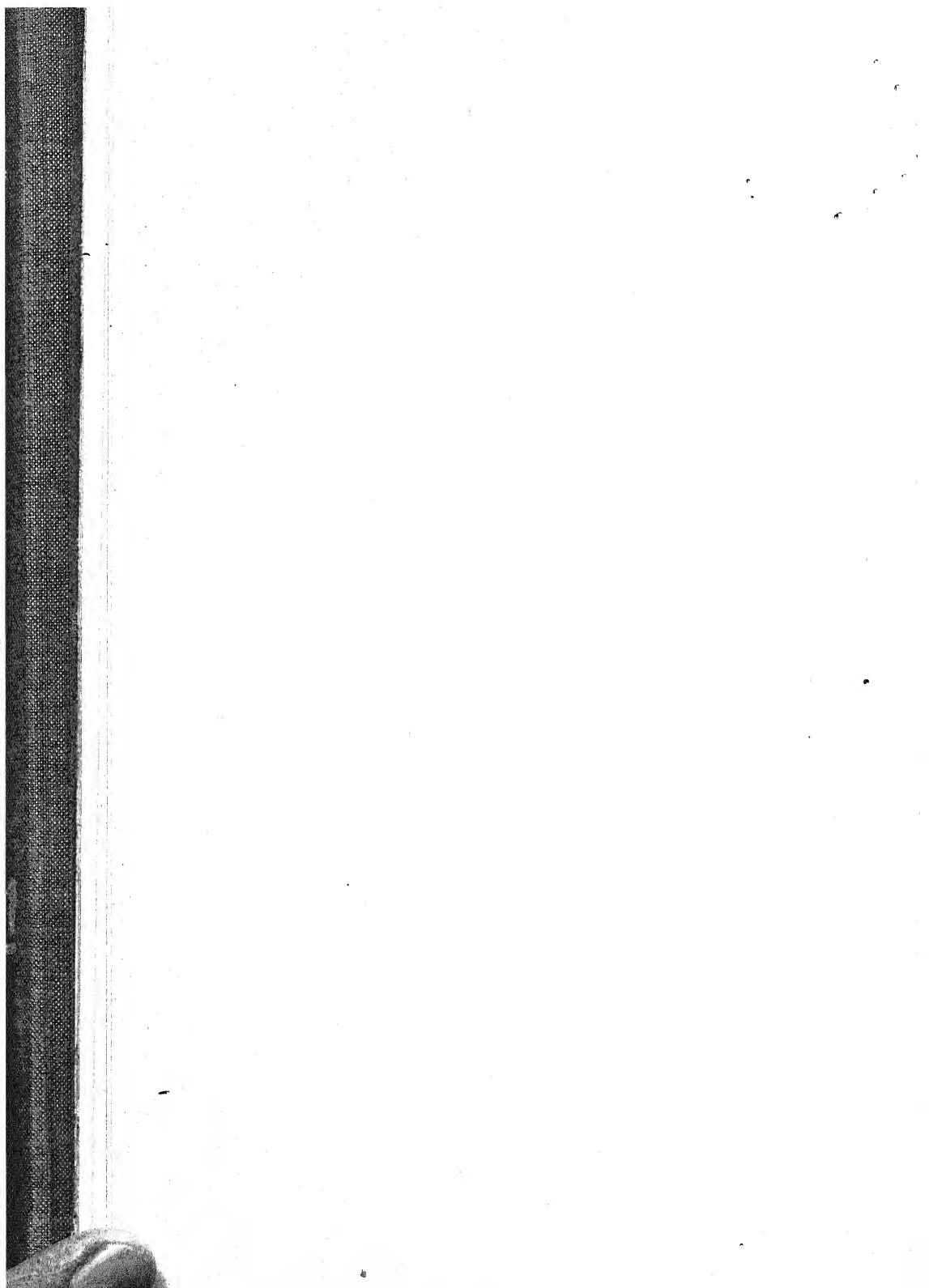
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NOTE ON REFERENCES

1. Accounts of debates and reports of speeches in the Constituent Assembly, Legislative Assembly, and National Convention, are taken, unless otherwise stated, from the *Moniteur* (*ré-impression*, 1863) and will be found under the dates given.

2. Accounts of proceedings at the Jacobin Club are taken, unless otherwise stated, from Aulard, *La Société des Jacobins* (1889-97), and will be found under the dates given.

3. The following abbreviations are used for books or periodicals frequently referred to:—

A.H. = *Annales Historiques*.

A.R. = *Annales Révolutionnaires*.

Arch. Parl. = *Archives Parlementaires*.

Aulard = A. Aulard, *Histoire Politique de la Révolution française* (5^e édition, 1921).

B. and R. = Buchez et Roux, *Histoire parlementaire de la Révolution française* (1834-8).

Blanc = Louis Blanc, *Histoire de la Révolution française* (1847-).

Carlyle = Thomas Carlyle, *The French Revolution* (1837).

Carnet = *Le Carnet de Robespierre*, in Mathiez, *Robespierre Terroriste* (1921), pp. 56-78.

Charlotte = H. Fleischmann, *Charlotte Robespierre et ses Mémoires* (1909).

Corresp. = *Correspondance de Maximilien et Augustin Robespierre, recueillie et publiée par Georges Michon* (1926).

Courtois = *Rapport fait au nom de la commission chargée de l'examen des papiers trouvés chez Robespierre et ses complices, par E-B. Courtois* (1795).

Croker = *Essays on the early period of the French Revolution, by the late Right Hon. John Wilson Croker* (1857).

C.P.S. = Aulard, *Recueil des Actes du Comité de Salut Public* (1889-99).

Deslandres = Maurice Deslandres, *Histoire Constitutionnelle de la France de 1789 à 1870* (1932).

Esquiros = A. Esquiros, *Histoire des Montagnards* (1847).

Fleischmann = H. Fleischmann, *Robespierre et les femmes* (1909).

Gower = *The Despatches of Earl Gower*, ed. Oscar Browning (1885).

NOTE ON REFERENCES

- Hamel = *Histoire de Robespierre et du Coup d'état du 9 thermidor* par Ernest Hamel (ed. Cinqualbre, 3 vols. in 2, n.d.).
- Jac. = A. Aulard, *La Société des Jacobins* (1889-97).
- Jaurès = Jean Jaurès, *Histoire socialiste de la Révolution française* (ed. Mathiez, 1922-4).
- Lamartine = A. de Lamartine, *Histoire des Girondins* (ed. 1902).
- Lav. = *Histoire nationale de la France contemporaine* (ed. Lavissee), tom. 1-2 (1920).
- Le Blond = *La vie et les crimes de Robespierre . . .* par. M. Blond de Neuvéglise (1795).
- Lenôtre = G. Lenôtre, *Robespierre et la 'Mère de Dieu'* (ed. 1926).
- Lewes = George Henry Lewes, *The Life of Maximilien Robespierre* (ed. 1899).
- Mathiez = Albert Mathiez, *The French Revolution* (E.T. of *La Révolution française*, 1922-), 1924.
- Michelet = J. Michelet, *Histoire de la Révolution française* (1847-53).
- Michon = Corresp. above.
- N. and Q. = Notes and Queries.
- Ording = Arne Ording, *Le Bureau de police du Comité de Salut Public* (1930).
- Pap. inéd. = *Papiers inédites trouvés chez Robespierre, Saint-Just, etc.* (1828).
- Paris = J. Paris, *La jeunesse de Robespierre* (1870).
- Proyart = J. M. Proyart, *La vie de Maximilien Robespierre* (1850).
- R.F. = Révolution Française.
- R.H. = Revue Historique.
- R.Q.H. = Revue des Questions Historiques.
- Stéfane-Pol. = Stéfane-Pol, *Autour de Robespierre: le Conventionnel Le Bas* (1900).
- Tourneux = M. Tourneux, *Les sources bibliographiques de l'histoire de la Révolution française* (1898).
- Tuetey = Tuetey, *Répertoire des sources bibliographiques de l'histoire de Paris pendant la Révolution* (1889).
- Vellay = C. Vellay, *Discours et rapports de Robespierre* (1908).
- Villiers = Pierre Villiers, *Souvenirs d'un déporté* (1802).
- Ward = Reginald Somerset Ward, *Maximilien Robespierre: a study in deterioration* (1934).
4. Other books are sometimes referred to by short titles, e.g. Mathiez, G. et M. = Mathiez, *Girondins et Montagnards* (6^e édition, 1930).

INTRODUCTION: THE EVIDENCE

I

ROBESPIERRE'S own writings consist of poems, essays, pleadings, speeches, articles, official documents, private letters, and notes.

The poems, all Juvenilia, have been recovered from various sources, and reprinted by Deprez, *Oeuvres complètes de Maximilien Robespierre* (1910), and by Lesueur (same title, 1912).

The essays have been reprinted by Deprez and by Lesueur.

The pleadings have been collected and printed both by Barbier and Vellay, *Oeuvres complètes de Maximilien Robespierre* (1910), and by Lesueur (same title, 1912): they are summarily described in Paris, *La Jeunesse de Robespierre*.

The speeches can be read in the *Procès-verbaux* of the Assemblies, in the files of the *Moniteur*, in the more fragmentary reports of other journals, and in accounts of the proceedings of the Jacobin Club (Aulard, *La Société des Jacobins*, 1889-97). The most important of them were printed as *brochures*, after delivery, and can be found in collections of revolutionary literature—thirty-seven are in the British Museum, and five in the Bodleian. Selections have been reprinted by Vermorel, *Oeuvres de Robespierre* (1865), Morse Stephens, *Orators of the French Revolution* (1892), and Vellay, *Discours et Rapports de Robespierre* (1908).

Robespierre's articles are to be found in the journals he edited—*Défenseur de la Constitution* (1792), and *Lettres à ses commettans* (1792): files of both are in the British Museum.

Official documents written, signed, or annotated by Robespierre occur in the correspondence and resolutions of the Committee of Public Safety (Aulard, *Recueil des Actes du Comité de Salut Public*, 1889-99), and the papers studied by

Ording (*Le Bureau de police du Comité de Salut Public*, 1930). Some further references occur in Lacroix, *Actes de la Commune de Paris pendant la Révolution* (1894-1909), and Charavay, *L'Assemblée électorale de Paris* (1890-5).

Michon, *Correspondance de Maximilien et Augustin Robespierre* (1926), collected for the first time all the known letters of Robespierre and his brother, and summarized those of his correspondents. For critical remarks on this edition, v. Thompson, *The French Revolution*, etc. (1933).

The so-called *Carnet de Robespierre*—a small notebook found among his effects—was reprinted in facsimile by Motteroz (1920?), and with a critical commentary by Mathiez, *Robespierre Terroriste* (1921); in the same volume is a reprint, with critical commentary, of the *Notes* Robespierre wrote for Saint-Just's *Rapport* against the Dantonists.

Recueil des oeuvres de Maximilien I. Robespierre et de pièces pour servir à son histoire, par J. W. Croker (1819), is the general title of the eleven volumes of *brochures* in the British Museum (907. f. 1) containing the part of Croker's collection concerning Robespierre. More papers of the same kind will be found under F.R. 375 (6 items), F. 166-7 (38 items) and F. 849-58 (112 items).

Robespierriana of all kinds—sometimes reprints of his writings—have accumulated in the files of the *Annales Révolutionnaires*, later *Annales Historiques*, ever since 1908; and some others can be found in the *Révolution Française*, *Revue Historique de la Révolution Française*, and other journals.

Two facts—the destruction of Robespierre's papers, as compromising documents, which went on under the anti-Jacobin reaction of 1794-9, and, to a lesser extent, under the Napoleonic and Bourbon regimes that followed;¹ and the encouragement given by the *Société des Etudes Robespierristes*, during the past twenty-seven years, to the publication of any sort of *document inédit* bearing on Robespierre, make it unlikely that much of value remains to be unearthed amongst the French archives.

¹Hamel (ed. 1862, 1/365, note) says the MSS. of most of Robespierre's speeches were destroyed by Simon Duplay in 1815.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

II

Of the many bibliographies, catalogues, and collections of material dealing with the French Revolution, the following have been found of special value for the study of Robespierre: Buchez and Roux, *Histoire parlementaire de la Révolution française* (40 vols., 1834); Aulard, *Recueil des actes du comité de Salut public* (12 vols., 1889-99); Aulard, *La société des Jacobins* (6 vols., 1889-97); Tourneux, *Bibliographie de l'histoire de Paris pendant la Révolution* (1890-1913); Tourneux, *Les sources bibliographiques de l'histoire de la Révolution française* (1898); Caron, Brière and Caron, Caron and Stein (three series), *Repertoire méthodique de l'histoire moderne et contemporaine de France* (1898-); Tuetey, *Repertoire des sources bibliographiques de l'histoire de Paris pendant la Révolution* (1889); Fortescue, *List of the contents of the three collections of books, pamphlets, and journals in the British Museum relating to the French Revolution* (1899); Schmidt, *Les sources de l'histoire de France depuis 1789* (1907); Caron, *Manuel pratique pour l'étude de la Révolution française* (1912); Cahen and Guyot, *L'oeuvre législative de la Révolution* (1913); Kuscinski, *Dictionnaire des Conventionnels* (1916).

III

All books dealing with the Revolution or Robespierre have to be read with one eye on the personal and political background of their authors. They are therefore put here in chronological order, and grouped under the periods into which the study of the subject can most easily be divided. Help has been found, in this connexion, in Thierry, *Lettres sur l'histoire de France* (1820); Frederick Harrison, *Historians of the French Revolution* (1883, reprinted in *The Choice of books*, 1886); Flint, *The Philosophy of History* (1893); Jullian, *Historiens français du XIXe siècle* (1896); Aulard, *Les premiers historiens de la Révolution française* (in *Études et Leçons sur la Révolution française*, 6e série, 1910); Acton, *The Literature of the Revolution* (Appendix to *Lectures on the French Revolution*, 1910); and Gooch, *History and Historians of the Nineteenth Century* (1931).

THE EVIDENCE

The aim of this bibliography is (1) to call attention to all books and articles dealing primarily with Robespierre, and to such general histories of the Revolution as are of special importance for the study of his career; and (2) to indicate, where it seems worth while to do so, the general character of these books, and their attitude towards Robespierre.

IV

Between 1789 and 1799 history was being made more rapidly than it could be written. The closing down of academies, schools, and *salons*, the distaste for what was traditional or authoritative, and the demand for political propaganda, turned literature into journalism, eloquence into rhetoric, and critical taste into the facile abuse or applause of the time-server. Such attempts as were made to produce a history of the Revolution either failed to keep pace with events, or were distorted by partisanship. It became not uncommon for the editors of serial works, whose earlier pages had blessed the reforms of the National Assembly, to fill their later volumes with vituperation of Robespierre and the Jacobin regime; whilst others attempted, not without difficulty, to dissociate the Revolution from revolutionists of whom they could no longer approve. Meanwhile, of the making of *brochures* there was no end—printed speeches, projects of legislation, papers (hardly yet distinguishable from pamphlets), and pasquinades. Press laws were passed, but the press remained free; and there was no effective check upon what one man might write about another, except the fear of what he might write in reply.

In most of these literary *genres* Robespierre—a writer and speaker whom circumstances and a mistaken ambition thrust into politics—was persistent and painstaking. When he fell, his memory bore the odium of more crimes than he had committed; and political literature contains nothing meaner or more vile than the anti-Jacobin pamphlets by ex-Jacobin authors which Croker collected from the lumber-rooms of Restoration booksellers.

The scanty elements of autobiography in Robespierre's speeches and writings will be noticed as they occur; they do not in fact tell us very much about him. The same may be said of the ephemeral pamphlets bearing on controversies about Robespierre's conduct during his life-time, or disputing, soon after his death, his character and career. Hardly any of them contain historical evidence which can be trusted, or corroborated.

There remain, however, from these early years, a certain number of historical or biographical sources of real value.

The *Histoire de la Révolution de 1789*, by 'Deux Amis de la Liberté,' began to appear in 1791. Vol. 7, describing the end of the Constituent Assembly (September 1791), came out in 1792. Then there was a long pause, and when Vol. 8 appeared, in 1797, the editors were found to have changed their view of the Revolution. Robespierre's followers are now 'brigands' or 'conspirators', comparable only to Catiline or Cartouche (8/137); and Robespierre himself, after an early career not unsympathetically described (12/7), becomes an arch-villain, who sets himself to crush all rivals (8/295), spends disreputable week-ends in the country (13/300), dreams of nothing but bloodshed, and plans to decimate the population—another Nero, 'the most ferocious cannibal, the most monstrous scoundrel to whom nature ever gave birth'. This view influenced Michelet and Carlyle, both of whom used the book. Michelet had a high opinion of Vol. 1, and derived from it his opinion (2/308) that Robespierre failed as an orator in the Constituent Assembly—a notion which coloured his whole psychological interpretation, and has become a commonplace among later historians.

Vie secrète et curieuse de M. J. Maximilien Robespierre, etc., by Du Perron, (Paris, Prévost, An. II) is bitterly hostile, but includes a personal description of Robespierre which is of some interest.

The history of Robespierre, political and personal (2nd ed., London, 1794), an anonymous English work, full of the

wildest nonsense, ends with *A brief sketch of the Person, Life, and Manners of Robespierre*, based on information 'from a person who knew him', which is apparently taken from the *Vie secrète* above.

A German work, *Maximilian Robespierre in seinem Privatleben geschildert von einem Gefangenen in Pallast Luxemburg* (Berlin, 1794) professes to be translated from a *Vie privée de Robespierre* published in Paris in May, 1794, and sold out within a day of publication. This work was described and partly translated by Avenel in *L'Amateur des Autographes* (July 16, 1863), and was used, in this form, by Cabanés, *Robespierre intime (Cabinet secret de l'histoire, 3/391)*. Its credibility can be judged from the fact that it represents Robespierre, as a boy of 8-10, going with his mother, 'an uncommonly pretty woman', to visit her brother Damiens, who was awaiting execution for his attempt to assassinate Louis XV, and whose fate made Maximilien an anti-royalist. The legend that Robespierre was a relation of Damiens was, it is generally agreed, invented by the royalist press: in any case Damiens was executed in 1757, a year before Robespierre was born.

The popular *Histoire de la conjuration de Maximilien Robespierre* (it went through many editions, and was translated into several languages) was one of a series of anti-Jacobin works published by C. F. L. Ventre de la Toulouse, dit Galart de Montjoie, editor of the Catholic Royalist journal *L'Ami du Roi*. He wrote with the animus of a proscript and an exile. Taine's judgement that, when his evidence can be confirmed, it deserves credit, is the most that can be said for him.

On January 5, 1795, the deputy Courtois read to the Convention his *Rapport fait au nom de la commission chargée de l'examen des papiers trouvés chez Robespierre et ses complices*. It was subsequently printed, by order of the Convention, and remained for many years a storehouse of anti-Robespierrist propaganda. It was not until the publication

of *Papiers inédits trouvés chez Robespierre, Saint-Just, etc., supprimés ou omis par Courtois* (Paris, 1828) that it was generally realized how dishonestly Courtois had done his work. A comparison of the two versions shows that, out of the first bundle (*liasse*) of 10 papers Courtois printed eight, out of the second (56) 17, out of the third (49) 42—most of these were anonymous letters of flattery or abuse, equally useful for his argument; out of the fourth (62) 11—here he omits the military mission of Saint-Just and Lebas; out of the fifth (35) 25—including a number of letters from spies; out of the sixth (34) 24—spies again; out of the seventh (46) 14; out of the eighth (30) 12; and all of the ninth, viz. 15. Thus, out of a total of 377 documents, Courtois only printed 153; and these were chosen so as to give colour to the rhetorical indictment of Robespierre with which his *Rapport* began. Not only so: in more than one instance he altered the text of his documents to Robespierre's disadvantage; instances will be found below (v. pp. 1/257n, 2/33n, 207).

The most important bibliographical problem bearing on the life of Robespierre is that of the authorship of a rare work called *La Vie et les Crimes de Robespierre, surnommé le Tyran; depuis sa naissance jusqu'à sa mort. Ouvrage dédié à Ceux qui commandent et à Ceux qui obéissent. Par M. le Blond de Neuvéglise. Colonel d'Infanterie légère.* (Augsbourg, 1795: for title-page, v. Frontispiece). It has hitherto been held, on the authority of Barbier, who had it from the Count de Firmas-Periès (v. Quérard, *Supercbéries*, sub *Le Blond*) that *Le Blond de Neuvéglise* was a pseudonym for a certain Abbé L. B. Proyart (1743-1808), whose nephew, the Abbé J. M. Proyart (1803-88), reissued the book, with omissions and additions, as *La Vie de Maximilien Robespierre*, at Arras in 1850. But a careful comparison of the two books shows (1) that *Le Blond de Neuvéglise* cannot have been the Abbé Proyart, (2) that his work can be exactly dated, (3) that he was an independent witness, whose evidence as to

Robespierre's early life, at least, is of considerable value, and (4) that the omissions and additions made by the later Abbé Proyart gave the edition of 1850 a tendency which the book did not originally possess.

(1) The author of *La Vie et les Crimes de Robespierre* is a Catholic and a Royalist, but not a priest; for he is a soldier (pp. 343, 368), who has emigrated, leaving behind a wife and children (p. 344). (2) He quotes Courtois' *Rapport*, which appeared in January, 1795 (p. 334); he knows of the exclusion of Cambon from the Finance Committee, on April 3 (p. 197); but Fouquier-Tinville, though convicted, has not yet been guillotined—May 7 (p. 98). The book was therefore written late in April or early in May, 1795. (3) The author made use of information supplied to him by the Abbé Proyart; the fact that he always puts such passages in the third person, and the way in which he refers to his informant (*M. L'Abbé Proyart . . . ne désavouera pas ce que nous allons rapporter à ce sujet*, p. 41) are conclusive. Add that when he was himself present he uses the first person, as (for instance) on the occasion of Robespierre's speech of welcome to Louis XVI (p. 48). The writer, then, was in close touch with Louis-le-Grand: he was also sufficiently behind the scenes at Arras to quote a private letter from Robespierre to *une Personne de sa Province* (p. 135), and to obtain particulars of his wardrobe in May, 1789, from Mme Marchand's maid, who packed his bag (p. 81). (4) The chief changes in Le Blond's book made by Proyart in 1850 are these. He adds the particulars, so beloved by sentimental biographers, about Robespierre's pet birds, and his dog *Brount* (p. 4); he adds a story, taken from his uncle's book, *Louis XVI, sa Vie et ses Vertus*, about Robespierre's lack of clothes while at College (p. 22); he corrects the *L'Aiguillette* of Le Blond's story (p. 77) into *Lantilette*, but misses the point by omitting the reference to Dubois de Fosseux (p. 40; cp. his omission of an abusive note about this man in Le Blond, p. 59); he adds further stories about Desmoulins from his uncle's *Louis XVI* (p. 51); he inserts an account of Fouquier-Tinville's execution (p. 55),

and of Hébert's (p. 56); he omits a long paragraph accusing Robespierre of duplicity (p. 63, *Le Blond*, 107); he adds an attack, as a priest might, upon Jacobin iconoclasm (p. 72), but tones down *Le Blond*'s royalist extravagances in the account of the king's trial (p. 84); he inserts, as a description of Robespierre's room at Humbert's, in the rue de Saintonge, a passage from Barbaroux's memoirs describing a visit to Robespierre's room at the Duplays, in the rue Saint-Honoré (p. 112); he expands *Le Blond*'s modest account of Robespierre's country house into a story of disreputable orgies (p. 117, cp. further details, p. 138); he omits two of *Le Blond*'s 'tallest' stories—the execution of Bousmard's parrot (p. 247), and the human skin tannery (p. 279); as well as a long account of Robespierre's intention to marry Madame Royale (p. 238); and he adds, at the end of the book, fresh descriptions of Robespierre's death from other sources, and, in place of *Le Blond*'s *Conclusion*, Pelletan's *Portrait de Robespierre*. The general effect of these changes is to substitute for the local antagonisms of the Arras officer the ecclesiastical prejudices of the Arras priest; to bring the book up to date, by omitting references to by-gone issues, and adding accounts of well-known events; and to replace discredited legends about Robespierre by domestic details more in the taste of 1850.

'*Le Blond de Neuvéglise*' was, therefore, a real man—a member, it can hardly be doubted, of that *Le Blond* family which played a large part in Arras affairs during the Revolution; not Gabriel *Le Blond*, for one of whose children Robespierre himself acted as godfather (*Corresp.* 439), nor his brother the General; for both of them, however anti-Jacobin they became, remained Revolutionists; but perhaps another brother, who took his name from a family property at Neuvéglise, south-west of Ypres, who emigrated in 1792, but kept in touch with Arras affairs, talked over 'old days' with his friend Proyard, and hoped, by this publication, to work up counter-revolution amongst Catholic-royalist exiles.

Some of this remains guess-work; but uncertainty as

to the exact authorship of the book does not detract from its value as the first serious biography of Robespierre, written by a man who was in close touch with Maximilien's native town, his college, his tutor, and his friends.

The comparative trustworthiness of Le Blond will be realized when his account of Robespierre is compared with that of some further contemporary historians. In 1796 F. X. Pagés, who had brought out, three years before, a poem in ten cantos celebrating the fall of the Gironde, published a *Histoire secrète de la Révolution française* (an English translation appeared the same year) recanting his earlier views, and attributing to Robespierre a 'base envy, engendered by the consciousness of his inferior abilities', and 'a desire of reigning solitary sovereign over ruins and carcases' (p. 60). In Fantin des Odoards' *Histoire philosophique de la Révolution* (1796)—a royalist work largely based on Girondist memoirs—Robespierre is represented as a leader of the Cordeliers Club, and Mirabeau, who died in April, 1791, as one of the authors of the prison massacres in September, 1792. Prudhomme's *Histoire générale et impartiale des erreurs, des fautes, et des crimes commis pendant la Révolution française* (1796-7) is a six-volume indictment of the Revolution, in which Robespierre's misdeeds are swallowed up in elaborate statistics of the number of *châteaux* burnt, of persons driven to madness or suicide, of victims of war, of starvation, and so forth, between 1789 and 1795. Desessarts' popular *Précis historique de la vie, des crimes, et du supplice de Robespierre* (1797, followed by various translations and new editions) is sufficiently characterized by its title. Finally, this stratum of anti-Jacobin history was explored, for the benefit of English readers, by John Adolphus, whose *Biographical Memoirs of the French Revolution* (2 vols. 1799) were praised by Croker as the best English work before his own, but were in fact based upon such inferior authorities (e.g., in the case of Robespierre, Montjoie) that they are of little historical value.

Between 1800 and 1815 the Napoleonic censorship of history—all the more effective because directed by a man who understood and appreciated historical studies—encouraged the production of chronological summaries, in which the Empire appeared as the climax of the French Monarchy, and frowned on any attempt to rehabilitate the Revolution. Though he was in the habit of saying—and he spoke from personal knowledge—that Robespierre was by no means the worst of the Jacobin leaders, Napoleon would not tolerate any public defence of a regime, the fear of whose return was one of the chief supports of his own. Thus denied the free study of its own age, history found an outlet in a Catholic romantic reconstruction of the Middle Ages; Michaud's *Histoire des Croisades* and Chateaubriand's *Les Martyrs* became the school in which Michelet learnt a new approach to the Revolution.

Four histories of the Revolution published during this period were more than superficial chronicles. De Moleville's *Histoire de la Révolution de France* (1800), enlarged from his *Mémoires secrets* of 1793, and subsequently extended by Delisle de Salle (in English, *Annals of the French Revolution*), is nothing more than an immense counter-revolutionary pamphlet; but the author admits Robespierre as the one exception to his thesis that the revolutionary leaders were in the pay of the Court. Lacretelle's *Histoire de la Révolution française* (begun in 1801, but taking final form in 1824-6) is a hostile account of the three revolutionary Assemblies by a Deist who turned Catholic, a liberal constitutionalist who became a royalist, and a Girondin who lived to serve under Louis XVIII. Beaulieu, always a royalist, put together his personal reminiscences, and quotations from the *Moniteur*, into *Essais historiques sur les causes et les effets de la Révolution française* (1801-3). The only value of these two works lies in the occasional relics of eye-witness they enshrine.

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On the other hand, Toulangeon, *Histoire de la France depuis la Révolution de 1789* (1801-10), was the first historian to attempt a sober and impartial account of the facts, such as might help extremists to understand one another; he was also the first to quote his sources, document his narrative, and distinguish between first and second-hand evidence. His account of Robespierre's rise and fall is as reasonable and impartial as, at that date, he dared make it.

In 1802 a certain Pierre Villiers, who described himself as *ancien capitaine de Dragons*, and said that most of his papers had been destroyed in a police raid on 18 Fructidor, An. IV, entrusted a friend with the publication of what was left; and they appeared the same year, under the title of *Souvenirs d'un Déporté, pour servir aux Historiens, aux Romanciers, aux Compilateurs d'Ana, aux Folliculaires, aux Journalistes, aux Feseurs de tragédies, de comédies, de vaudevilles, de mélodrames, et de pantomimes dialoguées*. Neither the sub-title, nor the mystification of the *Avis au public*, nor the character of the book, which is a haphazard collection of insipid and faintly indecent stories and verse, inspires much faith in the trustworthiness of its author. Yet the book contains a few pages (pp. 1-6, 19, 43, 87) about Robespierre which bear the stamp of originality and truth. Villiers states that for seven months of the year 1790 he used to visit Robespierre's rooms in the rue Saintonge, and act as his secretary; and he gives some particulars of his life at that time which are of the highest value. A copy of this very rare book, from Lord Acton's collection, is in the University Library at Cambridge.

VI

The return of peace, the removal of the Napoleonic censorship, and the influence of the romanticists, made the fifteen years following Waterloo a spring-time of French historical studies. It is also due to this period that the history of the Revolution began to be written—and continued to be

written—with an eye to contemporary politics; it was not without intention that Thiers or Mignet recalled the revolutionary scenes of 1789 on the eve of those of 1830. As the Bourbon regime declined from the constitutionalism of Louis XVIII into the reactionism of Charles X, historians of the Revolution once more experienced the change from Girondism to Jacobinism, and there were the beginnings of a rehabilitation of Robespierre.

Mme de Stael, whose *Considérations sur les principaux événements de la Révolution française* appeared in 1818—two years after her death—was the first writer to popularize the idea that the Revolution ‘went wrong’ after 1791. She had met Robespierre at her father’s house in 1789, and continued to regard him as an austere fanatic, who won leadership by his singleness of purpose, and lost it by thirst for power (2/130).

The great works of Thiers (*Histoire de la Révolution française*, 10 vols, 1823-7), and Mignet (*Histoire de la Révolution française depuis 1789 jusqu’à 1814*, 1824) had one origin and one purpose—to show that the Revolution was essentially a national movement, and that its extravagances and crimes were due to the opposition of the royalist party. Constitutionalism was represented for the first time (always with an eye on Charles X), as counter-revolution. Thiers, owing to the obscurity surrounding his early collaboration with Bodin, and his careless use of authorities, deserves a little of the abuse poured on him by Croker (*Essay* 1), but Mignet is generally accounted a judicious and honest writer. His Robespierre, though commendable as an anti-royalist, is actuated by jealousy and ambition. Owing to his inferior talents he was late in becoming a leader—a great advantage in a revolution. But he was destroyed by his passion for power.

Amongst the crowd of smaller works which came out during these years, a biographer of Robespierre will notice Méda’s *Précis historique des événements qui se sont passés dans*

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le soirée du 9 thermidor (1825), defending the author's claim to have shot Robespierre; an article by Nodier in the *Revue de Paris* (1829) on Robespierre as an orator; and another by Deschiens, in his *Bibliographie des journaux* (1829), afterwards published in book form, entitled *Opinion sur Robespierre*, which restated for the first time Napoleon's suggestion that Robespierre was put to death as a Moderate, who attacked the extremists, and opposed the Terror.

The so-called *Mémoires authentiques de Maximilien Robespierre*, whose publication (2 vols, 1830) coincided with the end of this period, is a 'manifest fabrication' (Croker, 299) by Charles Reybaud, containing a few scraps of authentic material, and a number of extracts from the *Moniteur*, ending in September, 1791. It is of no historical value.

VII

The revolution of 1830 was largely the work of historians. The new king, Louis Philippe—ex-Jacobin, ex-emigré, son of a regicide, and cousin of the prince his father had condemned to death—was himself a historical monument, and under his patronage unprecedented opportunities were provided for a new generation of historians. Michelet's *Précis de l'Histoire moderne* (1827) proclaimed, too, a new method, combining the romantic approach of Chateaubriand with Vico's search for the animating ideas, and Herder's insistence on the physical background of history. Besides, it was now possible to study the Revolution freely and sympathetically, to collect its relics, to question its survivors, and to fight over again the battle between the Mountain and the Gironde. As 1830 moved towards 1848, and the Government once more became reactionary, the experiences of 1815-30 were renewed; but whereas Thiers and Mignet need only recall the constitution of 1791 to overturn a Bourbon who had forgotten nothing and forgiven nothing, Michelet and Blanc must justify Jacobinism and the Republic of 1793 against an Orléans who was trying to forget everything since 1791. Towards one belief all the historians of

these eighteen years converged—that the Revolution was a national event, springing out of the soil and homes of France; its virtues French virtues, and its faults French faults. Meanwhile other countries—England, following Croker, and Germany, Niebuhr—took up the study of a period which they were at last able to disentangle from the toils of the Napoleonic Empire.

Revolutionary studies were immensely helped by the publication, between 1834 and 1838, of Buchez and Roux's *Histoire parlementaire de la Révolution française*, in forty volumes—less a history than a huge repertory of documents, but influenced throughout by Buchez's belief that the Revolution was the climax of Christian civilization, Jacobinism its gospel, and Robespierre its apostle (v. Prefaces to Vols. 1 and 40). For Robespierre, the re-trial of his case after Thermidor (Vols. 33-4) is specially important, and some of his papers are reprinted in Vol. 35.

Simultaneously with Buchez's work, a first attempt was made to collect and publish the *Oeuvres de Maximilien Robespierre* (2 vols. 1832, 3 vols. 1840-2), by Laponneraye, who had just suffered imprisonment for delivering a course of Sunday lectures to working men on the Revolution. This edition contained none of Robespierre's writings before 1789, and not all of them afterwards; but it was a significant gesture, and started a definite movement for his rehabilitation.

Three years later Laponneraye made himself responsible for a publication which has roused much controversy—*Mémoires de Charlotte Robespierre* (1835); in the second edition *sur ses deux frères* was added to the title. The violence with which Croker (*Essays*, p. 300) assailed the authenticity of these memoirs seems a little forced. The pretence that Robespierre's sister, who died in 1834, had left the completed MS. to Laponneraye for publication is transparent enough, and the style is Laponneraye's own: but there is no reason to doubt that he obtained most of his material in

the course of conversations with Charlotte; or that the sentimentality with which it is clothed was as much that of the repentant sister (cp. the language of her will; *Charlotte*, 116) as of the enthusiastic disciple. However this may be, these *Mémoires* are our only authority for many details of Robespierre's personal and domestic life.

Another admirer of Robespierre whose reminiscences helped to revise the public estimate of him was Buonarroti, a fellow-conspirator of Babeuf. Bronterre O'Brien, who knew him, and used his writings, remembered seeing 'that brave and venerable old man, at the advanced age of seventy-eight, shed tears like a child at the mention of Robespierre's name' (*Dissertation and Elegy*, 7). 'If the political doctrines comprised in Robespierre's Declaration of Rights', he writes, 'and in the discourses which Robespierre delivered in his last days, are viewed in juxtaposition with the purity of his morals, his devotedness, his courage, his modesty, and his rare disinterestedness, we are forced to render a brilliant homage to so lofty a wisdom' (*History of Babeuf's Conspiracy*, English translation, 1836); and the same view characterizes his *Observations sur Maximilien Robespierre* (1837).

The same year O'Brien published the first volume of his own *The Life and Character of Maximilian Robespierre*, but was forced to discontinue the work owing to a 'dark, cruel, and systematic private and public persecution,' on the part of the English middle class, who feared, he thought, his exposure of their 'System of fraud and murder.' For O'Brien's later work, v. p. xxxvi.

English middle class opinion found, at this time, a serious and long-winded exponent in Sir A. Alison, whose *History of Europe from the commencement of the French Revolution to 1815* came out in fourteen volumes between 1833 and 1842. More critical in his elaborate marginal references, and copious extracts from documents; than in his use of sources, Alison makes no secret of his views: the French Revolution

illustrates the perils of political innovation, the law of nature by which social evils, running to excess, purge themselves out of the body politic ('The same principle which drove the government of Robespierre through the Reign of Terror to the ninth of Thermidor impelled Napoleon to the snows of Russia and the rout of Waterloo'), and the overruling design of Providence, impressed in Bossuet's words, *Les hommes agitent, mais Dieu les mene.*

A less popular but more formidable champion of English middle-class views of the Revolution was J. W. Croker, whose reviews of French works on the period, contributed to the *Quarterly Review* between 1823 and 1853, were reprinted as *Essays on the early period of the French Revolution* in 1857. Croker not only knew more about the Revolution than any other Englishman of his day, and was a diligent collector of the 48,000 pamphlets which place the British Museum second only to the Bibliothèque Nationale as a store-house of Revolutionary literature; but he also had a knowledge of parliamentary life which enabled him to expose the party intrigues and electoral devices of the revolutionary leaders. His essay on *Robespierre* (1835) is shrewder in its detailed judgements than in its wider generalizations; but it suggests that, intending simply to curse, the writer gradually realized that Robespierre was a psychological problem, and ended, not indeed by blessing, but by pitying: 'obscure and unaccountable as the whole of Robespierre's later conduct was, we repeat our inclination to believe that the chief cause of his fall was his being suspected of an intention of returning to some system of decency, mercy, and religion' (p. 420). The essay is still well worth reading.

The year 1837 saw the publication of one of the most famous, and (for English readers) most influential of all histories of the French Revolution. Critics of Carlyle

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(e.g. Acton, *Lectures on the French Revolution*, 358; Alger, *Paris in 1793-4*, Appendix D; Aulard, Preface to French edition of 1912) are agreed that his historical insight and dramatic sense triumphed over an inadequate study of authorities. His Robespierre—'that anxious, slight, ineffectual-looking man, under thirty (*but he was thirty-one*), in spectacles; his eyes (were the glasses off) troubled, careful; with upturned face, snuffing dimly the uncertain future times; complexion of a multiplex atribiliar colour, the final shade of which may be the pale sea-green;' 'most consistent, incorruptible of thin acrid men'—'acrid, implacable-impotent; dull-drawling, barren as the Harmattan wind'—is a cruelly life-like caricature. Unfortunately, Carlyle's failure to see the constructive side of the Revolution (he called it 'the suicide of the eighteenth century'), and the passion which led him not to 'investigate much more about it, but to splash down what I know in large masses of colours, that it may look like a smoke and flame conflagration in the distance, which it is' (letter to Mrs. Carlyle, 1836), blinded him to most of what is important in Robespierre.

Ten years later, on the eve of the Revolution of 1848, and with an eye to the Republic which he was sure would follow, Lamartine wrote his *Histoire des Girondins* (1847)—a work in which feeling so distorts fact that Alexandre Dumas congratulated its author on having lifted history to the level of romance (Acton, 347). In this apotheosis of Republican virtue, Robespierre stood for Utopia: the pity was that the kind guest of the Duplays (of whom Lamartine heard from Mme Lebas) let himself become a tyrant and a terrorist—a Marius instead of a Cato—and so disqualified himself as an idol in 1848. The only type of revolutionism (Lamartine reckoned) fit for popular consumption was Girondism.

Esquiros, in his *Histoire des Montagnards*, the same year, set himself to answer Lamartine. To him the influence of the Girondins was transitory, that of the Jacobins permanent;

the *Montagne* was the Mount Sinai of the new order, from which, 'amid thunder and lightning, are revealed' (by the mouth of Moses-Robespierre), 'the oracles of transfigured humanity'.

The most learned and critical rehabilitation of Robespierre and Jacobinism that this period produced came from Louis Blanc, whose *Histoire de la Révolution française* (1847-) treated the Revolution as the climax of an age-long movement from Authority to Individualism, which itself culminated in a transition to Rousseauistic Fraternity. Of this creed Robespierre, an intellectual fanatic, whose faith and political foresight outweighed his crimes, was the apostle. In his portrait of the man, Blanc owed much to the reminiscences of Souberbielle, the Duplays' doctor, and to hitherto unpublished letters of Robespierre.

Meanwhile Michelet, the greatest national historian, had escaped from the glamour of Rome and the Middle Ages to proclaim (in *Le Peuple*, 1846) his belief in the undying unity and patriotism of the French people; and the approach of the Revolution of 1848 threw him into a passionate study of 1789. 'The unbelievable happiness of finding the story, after sixty years, so vivid and so exciting swelled my heart with a heroic joy, and the paper on which I wrote seemed impregnated with my tears' (Preface of 1868). 'From the first page to the last (he wrote) there is one hero, and one only—the People' (9/361). As the People's mood changes, so does its regard for Robespierre. In 1789 he is the diligent and austere lawyer who forces himself upon the attention of the Assembly. Soon he wins the support of the Jacobins, the women, and the priests; later, that of the provincial landlords. In the spring of 1791 he takes Mirabeau's place, and leads the Opposition; in the autumn he recreates and controls the Jacobin club. His position there, and his popularity as an incorruptible democrat, outweigh his pacifism in 1792, and his accusations of conspiracy in 1793. He is destroyed only when he becomes the dictator

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and terrorist of 1794, the author of the (to Michelet) offensive *Culte de l'Être Suprême* (Preface to Vol. 7). This view has, upon the whole, held the field, between the extremists who have either admired or detested everything that Robespierre did or said.

The controversies of the ten years before 1848 brought many smaller writers into the field for the defence or attack of the Jacobin leader. It will be enough to enumerate, as works of secondary importance: Schultze (*Wahrheitsfreund*), *Robespierre, mit Beziehung auf die neueste Zeit* (1837); Elsner, *Maximilien Robespierre, Dictator von Frankreich* (1838); Rabbe, *Robespierre (Biographie universelle et portative*, 1838); Nodier, *Robespierre (Dictionnaire de la conversation*, 1838); Vieillard, *Notice sur Robespierre (Encyclopédie des gens du monde*, 1844); Guillot, *Maximilien Robespierre et Monsieur Thiers (Revue indépendante*, 1845); Gallois, *Étude sur Robespierre considéré comme journaliste (Histoire des journaux et journalistes de la Révolution française*, 1845-6); Reinier, *Robespierre (Dictionnaire encyclopédique de France*, 1845); Anon., *Histoire de Robespierre* (1846); Pont, *Sur Maximilien Robespierre (Le Haro*, Caen, 1847, answering Guillot); Travers, *Maximilien Robespierre (Journal*, Caen, 1847, answering Pont); Bergonnioux, *Robespierre* (1847); Pelletan, *Portraits de Robespierre et de Marat (La Presse*, 1848, answering Esquiros); Pillet, *Le Robespierre de M. de Lamartine* (1848); and a *Journal de la réforme sociale*, entitled *Le Robespierre*, of which four numbers were published in Paris in 1848.

VIII

Between 1848 and 1870 the constitutional reaction from republicanism towards Bonapartism, if not Bourbonism, suggested the idea, which may have got some help from *The Origin of Species* (1859), that the national development tended to 'revert to type'. But this notion, admirable as a clue to the past, was a dangerous argument to apply to the future.

If Napoleon could justify his regime as true to the French liking for Liberal Dictatorships, so could his opponents justify rebellion against him as true to the *frondeur* tradition of 1649, 1789, 1830, and 1848. If a tendency towards kings was French, so was a tendency towards regicide. If the Revolution was an integral part of the national history, Jacobinism was an integral part of the Revolution. If Napoleon was a French liberator, so was Robespierre. The interest aroused in Robespierre by Laponneraye, Buchez, and Louis Blanc was carried almost to excess in the years following 1848. His speeches were collected and published; details of his family and youth were disinterred; his biography was written in English and Italian; he became the subject of a German tragedy. Finally Hamel, collecting every fact that could be learnt about him, composed not so much a Life as a panegyric, and did his best to prohibit, for the future, all secular study of a canonized saint.

The period opens with an English work. George Henry Lewes, the spiritual ancestor of our amateur philosophers, was led to write *The Life of Maximilian Robespierre* (1849) by interest in the Revolution of 1848. He relied mainly on Lamartine, Michelet, and Louis Blanc, the last of whom lent him some hitherto unpublished letters of Robespierre. Avoiding extremes either of praise or blame, he represented the man as a political fanatic—'honest, self-denying, and consistent', but also 'cowardly, relentless, pedantic, unloving, intensely vain, and morbidly envious'; one who 'has not left the legacy to mankind of one grand thought, nor the example of one generous and exalted action' (394-7).

A year later Villiaumé at last published the results of long investigation and meditation. His *Histoire de la Révolution française* (1879) attempted to rehabilitate Marat as Robespierre's collaborator, and as the author of most of the beneficent acts of the Revolution.

Lodieu's *Maximilien Robespierre*, published at Arras the same year, contained thirty pages of biography, and a

hundred of *considérations*, showing how Lamartine had failed to do Robespierre justice. This was the book which roused the Abbé Proyard to re-edit, in his uncle's name, Le Blond's *La vie et les crimes de Robespierre* (v. p. xxi).

A weightier reply to the apologists for Jacobinism, inspired by Garat's Memoirs, and by the coup d'état of 1850, was Barante's *Histoire de la Convention Nationale*—the work of 'a more or less liberal Orléanist, who has no sympathy with the democracy of the Year II' (Aulard, *Études*, 7/218), and who sees, in the overthrow of the republic of 1848, the condemnation of that of 1793. Robespierre, whom Garat compared to Jesus, was a despot who died because he dared not end the Terror.

The *Geschichte des Revolutionszeit* of von Sybel (1853—; English and French translations), whilst anticipating de Tocqueville's view of French history (Acton, 369), studied the Revolution, for the first time, in its relation to European history as a whole. To von Sybel, as to Louis Blanc, the revolutionary movement of 1789 fell into line with the disciplined progress of the modern world from authority to freedom; but it was carried to extremes of violence and immorality, became purely destructive, and therefore ended in military despotism and international reaction. In such a scheme, political personalities count for little, and the fall of Robespierre is described 'as an episode in the partition of Poland' (Acton).

In *L'Ancien régime et la Révolution* (1857; English translations) de Tocqueville began his impeccable study of French society on the eve of the Revolution; but the sequel, which was to compare it with post-revolutionary society, was never written. If he had described the Jacobin regime, he would doubtless have seen in it an instance of French political atavism; had he drawn Robespierre, it would have been in the attitudes of a Louis XIV.

In 1857 Bronterre O'Brien followed up his unfinished *Life and character of Robespierre* (p. xxx) with *An Elegy on the death of Robespierre*, a poem in twenty parts, in honour of 'the greatest reformer and legislator the world has yet

known: two years later he included this in a larger publication, *A dissertation and elegy on the life and death of the immortal Maximilian Robespierre*, together with 'notes in elucidation' of both compositions, which included a *Life of Robespierre* in sixteen chapters, down to the end of the Constituent Assembly.

It was left to Hamel to consummate the work of Robespierre's admirers in his *Histoire de Robespierre* (1862). Collecting, with immense diligence and devotion, every tradition or document that bore on his subject, and professing complete impartiality, frankness, and criticism of his sources (Preface to Vol. I), he is yet so carried away by his enthusiasm for the Revolution of 1848, by his indignation with attacks upon his grandfather's friend, Saint-Just, and by the charms of rhetorical hero-worship, that every word and act of Robespierre is viewed in a distorting glass, and each detail added only serves to make the whole picture less trustworthy.

It was not unnatural that Hamel's uncritical eulogy of Robespierre should be followed by a reaction.

Quinet was, like Michelet, a democrat, whose lectures (at the Collège de France in 1841-5) helped to bring about the Revolution of 1848: unlike Michelet, he believed that religion was the basis of social and political reform, and in his *La Révolution* (1865) attributed the failure of the Revolution to its refusal to break with the Catholic Church, and to put Protestantism in its place (1/163). Robespierre's solution—a civic religion à la Rousseau—he could not accept; and was puzzled by Robespierre himself, inclining to the view that he was a mere talker, who shrank from personal dictatorship (2/293, 310).

Vermorel's *Oeuvres de Robespierre*, a selection from the speeches, with a historical introduction, was accused by Hamel of *dénigrement systématique* of his hero.

La Jeunesse de Robespierre, et la convocation des États-Généraux dans l'Artois, by J. Paris (1870, based on articles in

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Mémoires de l'Académie d'Arras, 1869) is the most important contribution made to the study of Robespierre's early career. Based on long research into local archives, it provides an indispensable documentation; and the fact that the author had as a colleague the Abbé J. M. Proyart (v. p. xxi), and to some extent drew on his uncle's reminiscences, (v. Fleischmann, Introduction to *Mémoires de Charlotte Robespierre*) does not seriously detract from the importance of his book.

Of minor works during this period, attention may be called to: Dinaux, *La Société des Rosati à Arras* (1850)—an account of the Poetry Club to which Robespierre belonged; Opitz, *Robespierre's Triumph und Sturz* (1850); Chabot, *Ce bon Monsieur de Robespierre!!!*, with the motto, *Lecteur, ne pleurez pas son sort, Car, s'il vivait, tu serais mort*; Grille, *La Fleur des Pois—Carnot et Robespierre* (1853); Jorry, *Les hommes de la Terreur* (1854); Maggiolo, *Robespierre* (1856); Mélicocq (La Fons, Baron de), *La famille Robespierre et ses armoires* (*Archives du Nord de la France*, 1858, 3e série, 6/72); von Ising, *Robespierre: ein Trauerspiel* (1859); and Quérard, *Robespierre* (*La France littéraire*, 1859-64),—summing him up as 'the French Caligula.'

IX

The disasters of 1870-1871 took the heart out of historical apologists, whether of Bonapartism or of republicanism: it only remained for Taine, turning from anatomy to history, to dissect the dead body of the Revolution, and enumerate the symptoms of the national disease. Martin's level-headed survey did something to redress the balance, and towards the end of the period Sorel, taking up von Sybel's work, described in a masterly way the international relations of the whole revolutionary epoch, which was by this time being seriously studied abroad.

In his *History of English Literature* (1863) Taine had disputed Carlyle's view of the People in revolution; his experience of the Paris Commune brought him round to it, and he entered on the study of the events of 1789 with a conviction, as passionate as Michelet's, that the People was the villain of the drama. But whereas Michelet threw himself romantically into every mood of his characters, Taine had fixed a formula for them all: 'his Danton is a savage, his Robespierre a pedant, his Marat a lunatic, his Napoleon a *condottieri*, and the Revolution a fit of alcoholic frenzy' (Jullian, *Historiens français du XIXe siècle*, cxxvi). Consequently the part of his great work dealing with the Revolution—*Les origines de la France contemporaine*, Vol. 4, *La Révolution* (1876)—is more a pathological study than an impartial analysis of the facts.

Ch. d'Héricault's *La Révolution de Thermidor* (1878) is, as the sub-title says, a study of *Robespierre et le Comité de Salut Public*, based partly upon fresh sources, and treated in great detail; but the upshot is a portrait of Robespierre not unlike the conventional one that the author claims to reject: he is a man who aims at personal power by following every turn of public opinion, and by destroying every rival who gets in his way. At the same time, his policy, like the course of the Revolution, becomes increasingly constructive and governmental: even the Terror was an attempt to preserve the work of the Revolution (52-3). This book anticipates much modern work (e.g. by Mathiez, Lenôtre, and Kerr) upon the causes of the fall of Robespierre.

When Henri Martin, in the course of his long survey of French history, reached the *Histoire de France depuis 1789* (1878), he had come to regard the troubles of those times as part of a series of births and deaths, advances and retreats, ending in the final achievement of national liberty by the Third Republic. Asking himself why the Revolution of 1789 had failed, he answered that, if the Republic had been declared in 1791, before the outbreak of war, it might have

survived—a view which justifies the implicit, though not the expressed, policy of Robespierre during the winter of 1791-2.

Sorel was a friend of Taine, but trained in law instead of medicine, and viewing history, not from a laboratory, but from the windows of the French Foreign Office. His broad and level view of the revolutionary era is set out with so much art that it hides a certain conventionality of mind. His Robespierre is a foil to Danton, obscure where Danton was lucid (too lucid for a revolution), austere where Danton was immoral; but at bottom 'one of those shallow and empty souls who become famous in history because they are, for a moment, the puppets of fate' (3/511). This is too easy a view; and overlooks characteristics which had puzzled, and were to puzzle, more inquisitive minds.

The minor works of this period include several of more than usual importance: Morley, *Robespierre* (in *Critical Miscellanies*, Vol. I, 1877)—a brilliant and suggestive study, in which Robespierre is represented as essentially a speaker, driven into action through fear of being left behind—a Parisian Cicero; Brunnemann, *Maximilien Robespierre* (1880); Kolisch, *Marie-Antoinette, Mirabeau, Robespierre* (1880); Lecesne, *Arras sous la Révolution* (1882); and Schumm, *Maximilien Robespierre* (1885)—a Catholic-monarchist corrective to the panegyric of Hamel and Brunnemann.

Amongst articles dealing with Robespierre during this period are:

1878. Tarbouriesh, *Une anecdote révolutionnaire* (Revue Gascogne, 19/535)—Robespierre's execution.

1879. Dubois, *Deux apologistes de Gresset en 1785* (Mem. Acad. Amiens, 3/5/1).

1882. Nodier, *Recherches sur l'éloquence révolutionnaire* (R.F. 2/779).

1884. Advielle, *Les portraits de Robespierre et de Lebon au Musée Carnavalet* (R.F. 6/822, 915).

1885. Mallet du Pan, *Le Comité de Salut Public, La Convention, et les Jacobins* (R.F. 7/259); *Certificat de remise à Robespierre de la médaille du 10 août* (R.F. 8/723); Jean-Bernard, *Quelques poésies de Robespierre* (R.F. 9/97, 396).

x

The organization of historical studies in France, where it has probably been better done than in any other country (Jullian, cxxiv) was definitely directed to the study of the French Revolution by the appointment of Alphonse Aulard to a Lectureship founded by the Paris Municipal Council in 1886. From that date until the eve of the Great War he produced or edited a series of important books which influenced all subsequent workers in the same field. The only aspect of the Revolution that he tended to ignore—its social-economic background—was enthusiastically taken up, first, by Jean Jaurès, who induced the Government to make a grant, from 1905 onwards, towards the publication of documents bearing on the economic side of the Revolution; and then by Albert Mathiez, who, starting as a follower of Aulard, founded in 1907-8 an independent, and increasingly hostile society and magazine, devoted to a socialistic and Robespierist interpretation of the Revolution. Both Aulard and Mathiez formed schools of investigators: libraries were ransacked, and documents published at such a rate that constructive work on a large scale became increasingly difficult. But, for the first time, historians were able to feel that they had their hand on the real pulse of the People in revolution; and foreigners, not only in England and Germany, but also in Italy, Scandinavia, Russia, and America, were able to study, from the original documents, problems to which they found analogies in their own national history.

So many books have to be mentioned during this period that it will be best to classify them, rather arbitrarily, according to their importance for the study of Robespierre.

Aulard's *La Société des Jacobins* (6 vols. 1889-97) reprinted, with a historical and critical Introduction, all that seemed important in the papers and reported proceedings of the Jacobin Club. It is indispensable for a study of Robespierre's activities there.

Aulard's *Recueil des Actes du Comité de Salut Public* (12 vols. 1889-99) did the same for the papers of the Committee of Public Safety, and is equally indispensable.

Morse Stephens, *A History of the French Revolution* (2 vols. 1891) was the first English attempt to use part, at least, of the new evidence in a general history of the Revolution. Learned and sensible, it remained unfinished, ending in 1793. The same author's *Orators of the French Revolution* (2 vols. 1892) reprinted, with biographical and critical comments, a selection from the speeches of the revolutionary leaders.

Aulard's *Études et Leçons sur la Révolution française*, of which nine series appeared between 1893 and 1924, were reprints of articles on all aspects of the Revolution from *La Révolution française*, of which he was editor, and from other periodicals. They contain a good many articles dealing directly or indirectly with Robespierre.

Lord Acton's *Lectures on the French Revolution*, delivered at Cambridge between 1895 and 1899, were published posthumously in 1910. Written when Aulard was only beginning his work, and when it was still possible to say that 'in a few years all will be known that ever can be known' (372-3) but by a man whose insight and experience outweighed many authorities, these Lectures are of lasting value. Acton's judgement on Robespierre illustrates his limitations — 'the most hateful character in the forefront of history since Machiavelli reduced to a code the wickedness of public men.'

In 1896 appeared Vol. VIII, *La Révolution française*, of the *Histoire générale* edited by Lavis and Rambaud. Most of it was written by Aulard, and has the authority of his wide knowledge. 'Aulard's narrative is not complete, and lacks detail; but it is intelligent and constructive beyond all others, and shows the standard that has been reached by a century of study' (Acton, 372).

Aulard's *Histoire politique de la Révolution française* (1901) is a masterly synthesis of all that could be learnt, particularly from the new collections of official documents, as to the 'origins and development of democracy and the republic' (sub-title) between 1789 and 1804. To Aulard, Robespierre is the champion of the People, whose 'sincerity, perfect honesty, and austerity earned him the title of The Incorruptible' (422), but who changed his political colour with that of popular opinion, made an idol of his own virtues, and defeated his highest ends by *ses rancunes éternelles, inexorables*.

The *Histoire socialiste de la Révolution française*, by Jaurès (5 vols. 1901-4; new edit. by Mathiez, 8 vols. 1922) views the Revolution as the first stage in the progress of European society from economic bondage to spiritual liberty—the second beginning in 1848, and the third in 1871 (1/25). To Jaurès, Robespierre, though a democrat and a libertarian, is an arid, short-sighted leader, 'a strange mixture of optimism and pessimism—optimism as regards the moral worth of the People, pessimism as regards the equal distribution of property'; for whilst he deplored poverty, he would do nothing to destroy the monopoly of wealth (3/400). Here Jaurès anticipates the later Russian repudiation of Robespierre and Jacobinism. His book, especially the early volumes, remains a richly documented and often eloquent appreciation of the social-economic aspects of the Revolution.

Vol. 8 of the Cambridge Modern History, *The French Revolution* (1904), by Montagu and Moreton Macdonald, follows the usual plan of Acton's great compilation—something between expert and popular treatment, continuous history and detached essays. The standpoint is that of an enlightened conservatism.

Prince Kropotkin's *Velikaya Frantsuzskaya Revolyntsiya* (*La Grande Révolution*, 1789-1793; published in French, English, and German, 1909; not in Russian till 1917)

summed up the work of Michelet, Blanc, and Jaurès in a vivid and interesting sketch, which, moreover, applied to France, for the first time, ideas learnt in Russia, and from the practice of revolution, about the land question, the class-struggle, and the necessary failure of a movement which aims at the economic benefit of individuals, not of communities (E.T., 2/562-2). In Kropotkin's view, Robespierre already tends to become what he is in present-day Russian thought, a typical *petit bourgeois*, the product rather than the author of a policy, who rises and falls with the economics of Jacobinism.

At the end of this period (1911) Madelin, skimming the cream off the new knowledge of the Revolution, brought Carlyle up to date in his dramatic *La Révolution française* (English translation, 1916). It is the work of a receptive emotional mind, influenced by a study of Fouché to see the shadier aspects of revolutionary politics, and by admiration for Napoleon to regard the Empire as the logical outcome of the Revolution. Robespierre becomes a self-conscious, self-centred, 'infallible pontiff' (381), an Inquisitor, who dies as the victim of a 'palace revolution' (430). Madelin's later *Histoire politique de la nation française* (1926) shows, by the small proportion of space allotted to the Revolution, that he regards it as little more than an aberration in the monarchical course of French history from Louis XIV to Napoleon.

Books of secondary importance during this period are: Bravo, *Robespierre: cronica drammatica del Terror*, 1887; Juste, *Robespierre* (1887); Barbier, *Les Rosati* (1888); *The contemporary history of the French Revolution* (1889)—a convenient compilation from the *Annual Register*; Kleinschmidt, *Charakterbilder aus der französische Revolution* (1889); Strada, *Robespierre et la révolution de l'humanité* (1890); Bax, *The Story of the French Revolution* (1890)—originally written for *Justice*, and including an attack on Robespierre, in the Russian manner, as 'a *petit bourgeois*, a Philistine to the backbone, who desired a republic of *petit bourgeois* virtues,

with himself at the head, and was prepared to wade through a sea of blood for the accomplishment of his end' (v); Toft, *Statskoupet den 9 thermidor aar II—Robespierre's Fald* (1890); Bernard, *Quelques poésies de Robespierre* (1890); Barbier, *Lettres inédites d'Augustin Robespierre à Antoine Buissart* (1890-1); Welschinger, *Le livret de Robespierre* (in *Le Roman de Dumouriez*, 1890); Sardou, *Thermidor* (1891)—a play attacking the Terror, which led to a debate in the French Chamber, and to a speech by Clemenceau declaring the Revolution to be a *bloc*, which one must accept or reject as a whole; Eckhardt, *Figuren und Ansichten der Pariser Schreckenzeit* (1893)—with a careful but rather hostile portrait of Robespierre; Lenôtre, *Chez Robespierre (Paris Révolutionnaire)*, 1894—one of this author's over-imaginative reconstructions; Gros, *Le comité de Salut Public de la Convention nationale* (1894)—useful for Robespierre's work on the Committee; Sardou, *La maison de Robespierre* (1895)—an important contribution to an unimportant controversy; Cabanès, *Robespierre intime (Le cabinet secret de l'histoire, Vol. 3, 1897)*; Bleibtrau, *Von Robespierre zu Buddha* (1899); Brink, *Robespierre and the Red Terror* (1899); Stéfane-Pol, *Autour de Robespierre: le conventionnel Le Bas* (1901)—with important details of Robespierre's life at the Duplays', drawn from the reminiscences of Mme Le Bas; Belloc, *Robespierre: a study* (1901)—the author's reactions to Hamel's *Histoire de Robespierre*; reissued in 1927 without any use of later evidence; Alger, *The Fall of Robespierre* (Chap. xi of *Paris in 1789-94*, a store of curious information, 1902); de Poli, *Maximilien Robespierre, héraldiste* (1903); Salvemini, *La Rivoluzione francese, 1789-92* (1905)—a standard Italian work, ending with Valmy; the second edition influenced by Jaurès; Robespierre represented as the champion of the People (205); Alméras, *Les dévotes de Robespierre* (1905)—an anti-Robespierrist study of the Théot case; Stéfane-Pol, *De Robespierre à Fouché* (1906); Schmidt, *Pages choisies des grands républicains—Robespierre* (1907); Savine and Bournand, *Le 9 thermidor* (1907); Vellay, *Discours et Rapports de Robespierre* (1908)—a convenient selection; Peise, *Quelques vers*

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de Maximilien Robespierre (1909); Fleischmann, *Robespierre et les femmes* (1909; English translation misnamed *Robespierre and the women he loved*, 1913); Warwick, *Robespierre and the French Revolution* (1909)—the third volume of a trilogy beginning with Mirabeau and Danton; Buffenoir, *Les portraits de Robespierre* (1910)—the authority on this subject; Clerget, *Robespierre destructeur de la première République* (1910); Fleischmann, *Charlotte Robespierre et ses Mémoires* (1910)—an indispensable but badly produced edition of the Memoirs, with additional matter; Deprez, *Oeuvres complètes de Maximilien Robespierre* (1910)—begun under the auspices of the Société des Études Robespierristes, this ended after publishing *Les Oeuvres littéraires* (3 fascicules) and *Les oeuvres judiciaires* (4 fascicules); Barbier and Vellay, *Oeuvres complètes de Maximilien Robespierre* (1910)—begun in connexion with the *Revue historique de la Révolution française*, it never got beyond Vol. I, *Oeuvres judiciaires*, 1782-9; *Revue des curiosités révolutionnaires*—a special issue devoted to Robespierre (1910); Lesueur, *Oeuvres complètes de Maximilien Robespierre* (1912)—planned by the Société des Études Robespierristes; its publication suspended by the war; Clauzel, *Études humaines: fanatiques: I. Maximilien Robespierre* (1912)—of little historical value; e.g. Chap. I is constructed round the mistaken idea that Robespierre was nicknamed *Le romain*; Godard, *Le procès du 9 thermidor* (1912)—of no historical importance.

Amongst articles dealing with Robespierre during this period are:

1887. *Notes et souvenirs de Courtois* (R.F. 11/806, 922, 998).

1888. Robinet, *Robespierre aux archives* (R.F. 15/255)—his signature on the night of 9 Thermidor. *Un pamphlet sur Robespierre en 1791* (R.F. 15/457).

1890. Aulard, *Le Comité de Salut Public* (R.F. 18/5, 125, 232, 434, 19/27).

1891. Pagart d'Hermansart, *Le paratonnerre de Saint-Omer* (L'Indépendant du Pas de Calais, August 25-7). Ganderax, *A propos de Thermidor* (Revue bleue, 47/324). Aulard, *Le culte de l'Être Suprême* (R.F. 21/5, 134, 226, 307).

1892. *Robespierre et Méda* (R.F. 22/400). Aulard, *Le club des Jacobins* (R.F. 23/106).

1894. Dubov, *Les conventionnels poètes: Robespierre* (Revue bleue, 4/1/812).

1895. Métin, *Les origines du Comité de Sûreté Générale* (R.F. 28/257, 340). Guillaume, *Le personnel du Comité de Sûreté Générale* (R.F. 28/124, 219). Fragonard et Robespierre (R.F. 28/278, 462). Hamel, *La Maison de Robespierre* (R.F. 29/193, 380).

1896. Sallier, *Robespierre, ses principes, son système politique* (R.Q.H. 60/135). Aulard, *La politique religieuse du Comité de Salut Public* (R.F. 30/97, 31/9). Charavay, *Robespierre jeune et Bouchotte* (R.F. 30/549).

1897. Aulard, *Le bureau du club des Jacobins* (R.F. 31/415)
—names of officials.

1898. Bounal de Ganges, *Robespierre dictateur* (Rev. Mond. cath. 134/21). Albalat, *Une psychologie de Robespierre* (N.R. 111/19, 286). *Quelques mots sur Robespierre* (Carn. H. 2/880). *Les descendants de Robespierre* (Int. des Cherch. et Cur. 5/37, 278, 491, 576. 754, 868, 38/14).

1899. Bounal de Ganges, *Robespierre et Carrier en Vendée* (Rev. Mond. Cath. 6/22/122). *La sœur de Marat et la sœur de Robespierre* (Ch. Med. 6/623, 701). Coyecque, *La Maison de Robespierre* (Bull. Soc. Paris, 26/36). Téo, *Le Club Breton* (R.F. 36/385).

1900. *Relation de l'exécution de Robespierre* (Int. des Cherch. et Cur. 41/181). Zagoulaief, *La mort de Robespierre* (Rev. Britannique, 1/5, 174; 2/5, 181). Lévy-Schneider, *Les démêlés dans le Comité de Salut Public* (R.F. 38/97). Guillaume, *Le personnel du Comité de Salut Public* (R.F. 38/297).

1901. Daux, *Dictature de Robespierre et les mystiques révolutionnaires* (R.H. 79/224)—the Théot case. Mathiez, *Catherine Théot* (R.F. 40/481).

1902. *L'hymne à l'Être Suprême* (R.F. 43/347, 44/13, 45/130, 259; 47/543).

1904. *Louis XVIII et Robespierre* (Int. des Cherch. et Cur. 49/719). Pilon, *La jeunesse sentimentale de Robespierre* (Rev. bleue, 5/1/154). Pinson, *Fête célébrée en souvenir de la chute de*

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Robespierre, 1797 (Rev. Hist. Versailles, 1904, 316). Aulard, *Le Comité de Salut Public et les biens nationaux* (R.F. 46/514, 47/62).

1906. *Notes oratoires de Robespierre* (R.F. 50/451).

1908. Mathiez, *Un portrait de Robespierre* (A.R. 1/27), Barbier, *Le flambeau de Provence et la chandelle d'Arras* (A.R. 1/33). Lévi, *Robespierre dans le théâtre allemand* (A.R. 1/38). *Robespierre aux Rosati* (A.R. 1/90). Buffenoir, *Les portraits de Robespierre* (A.R. 1/244, 457, 641, 2/55, 220, 377). *Les Lettres inconnues de Robespierre* (A.R. 1/300). *Robespierre à l'Assemblée constituante* (A.R. 1/482). *La popularité de Robespierre en 1791* (A.R. 1/487). Lévi, *Autour du 10 août, 1793* (R.F. 55/236).

1909. Vellay, *Robespierre et le procès du paratonnerre* (A.R. 2/25, 201). *Une maladie de Robespierre* (A.R. 2/82). *Robespierre en l'An IV* (A.R. 2/84). *Guffroy contre Robespierre en 1789* (A.R. 2/243). Mathiez, *Robespierre et la déchristianisation* (A.R. 2/321, 513). *Un entretien avec M. Hamel* (R.F. 57/355).

1910. Pelissier, *Robespierre et une femme* (R.H.R.F. 1/45, 240). Vellay, *Mémoires de Charlotte Robespierre* (R.H.R.F. 1/110, 254, 436, 571). Madelin, *La dictature de Robespierre* (R.D.M. 6/1/867). Vellay, *Robespierre et Buzot en 1791* (R.H.R.F. 2/253). Atalone, *Un oeuvre de jeunesse de Robespierre* (Marches de l'Est. 1911, 300). Bart, *Une légende sur Robespierre* (Rev. Cur. Rev. 2/200, 230)—the story of Suzanne Ferber. Rudler, *Robespierre dans la correspondance de Benjamin Constant* (A.R. 3/92). *Fausse légende sur la famille de Robespierre* (A.R. 3/103). *Robespierre chez Duplay* (A.R. 3/106). Mathiez, *Robespierre et le culte de l'Être Suprême* (A.R. 3/209). Fleischmann, *Charlotte Robespierre et Guffroy* (A.R. 3/321). Mathiez, *La politique de Robespierre et le 9 Thermidor expliqués par Buonarroti* (A.R. 3/481). Fribourg, *Le Club des Jacobins en 1790* (R.F. 58/507, 59/52, 129).

1911. *Robespierre apprécié par Mme Julien* (A.R. 4/93). *Robespierre et Talleyrand* (A.R. 4/102). Letaconnoux, *Un portrait inconnu de Robespierre* (A.R. 4/206). *Un témoignage sur Robespierre* (A.R. 4/231). Vermale, *Leconte de Lisle et Robespierre* (A.R. 4/289). Fleischmann, *Le Masque mortuaire*

de Robespierre (A.R. 4/601). Lévy, *Le robespierrisme en 1849* (A.R. 4/654). Charlotte Robespierre et la réaction thermidorienne (R.F. 60/344).

1912. Marcel, *Contribution à l'iconographie de Robespierre* (A.R. 5/37). Un arrière grand oncle de Robespierre (A.R. 5/88). Robespierre et le Comité de Salut Public (A.R. 5/89). Lesueur, *Généalogie de la famille de Robespierre* (A.R. 5/237). Lesueur, *Robespierre et Charles Michaud* (A.R. 5/325). Vermale, *Danton, Robespierre, Comte, et Aulard* (A.R. 5/625). Ouwrad et Robespierre (A.R. 5/692).

1913. Grasilier, *Un secrétaire de Robespierre: Simon Duplay* (R.H. 114/117). Lesueur, *Un médaillon inédit de Robespierre* (A.R. 6/87). Mathiez, *Les divisions de la Montagne* (A.R. 6/209). Marat, *Défense de Robespierre en 1792* (A.R. 6/392). Mathiez, *La politique sociale de Robespierre* (A.R. 6/551). Lesueur, *Comment Robespierre composa l'éloge de Gresset* (A.R. 6/635).

XI

The immediate effects of the Great War upon the study of the French Revolution were the loss of life among historians, especially the younger men, the representatives of new ideas; the breaking off of undertakings, such as editions of Robespierre's works, begun before 1914; the disorganization of studies, e.g. through failure to produce or to take in periodicals; the distraction of interest and funds from scholarship and research to controversy and propaganda; and still more serious, both during and after the war, the suppression, in some countries, of independent thought and free enquiry. It is too soon to estimate the results of all this, or to assess the general trend of revolutionary studies since 1918; but two influences are obvious—that of Mathiez, and that of Marxism—the one idolizing Robespierre, and finding the essence of the Revolution in a kind of state socialism; the other rejecting Robespierre and his ideas as *petit bourgeois*, and finding, to some extent in Marat, but more fully in Babeuf, the beginnings of communism and the proletarian revolution.

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Lukin, *Maksimilian Robesper* (*Maximilian Robespierre*, 1919)—described by the author as 'a scientific popular work, based on original documents', deals with Robespierre's career under the three Assemblies, with special attention to agrarian and economic questions. The heading of the Introduction—'Contradictoriness of class interests at the outset of the Revolution'—indicates the modern Russian point of view.

Sagnac and Pariset, *La Révolution* (1789-92 by Pariset, 1793-9 by Sagnac, in *Histoire de France contemporaine*, ed. Lavissee, 1920) is the most complete, impartial, and well-arranged narrative produced since the war, with discussions of disputed points, and full bibliographies.

Mathiez, *Robespierre Terroriste* (1921) contains two papers expounding Mathiez's view of Robespierre, and critical editions of two essential documents—the *Carnet*, and the *Notes* for Saint-Just's report on the Dantonists.

Mathiez, *La Révolution française* (1922, English translation, 1926) sums up his detailed studies of the subject in a closely-packed narrative, showing intimate knowledge of parties and personalities, stress on social-economic factors, and Robespierrist sympathy. The best account hitherto given of the inner history of the Revolution.

Zacker, *Robesper* (*Robespierre*, 1925)—a short biography, but illustrative of the Russian Marxian standpoint, to which the class-struggle and the economic motive are all-important, and Robespierre is '*petit bourgeois* in his ideas and his activity, just as he is *petit bourgeois* in his personal life' (91)—the representative of a party which fails, and is cast aside, as soon as its economic limitations became a drag on the wheel of proletarian progress.

Michon's edition of the *Correspondance de Maximilien et Augustin Robespierre* (1926) prints all Robespierre's known letters, and summarizes those of his correspondents. The work is indispensable to the study of Robespierre, but might have been better done, and requires considerable addenda and corrigenda: cp. p. xvi.

Lenôtre, *Robespierre et la Mère de Dieu* (1926, English

translation, *The rise and fall of Robespierre*, 1927) is the most ambitious attempt of the anti-Robespierrist school to provide an alternative to Mathiez's account of his fall, special stress being laid on the Théot case.

Kerr, *The Reign of Terror* (1927) is a detailed study of the last phase of Jacobinism, and of the fall of Robespierre, by an American follower of Mathiez.

Mazzuchelli, *Robespierre* (1930) is a competent Italian biography, using some of the new material, especially for the early life of Robespierre.

Lefebvre, Guyot, and Sagnac, *La Révolution française* (1930). A comprehensive history, from a modernized Sybel-Sorel standpoint, with a concluding section on *The French Revolution and European civilization*, by Sagnac.

Somerset Ward, *Robespierre: a study in degeneration* (1934) attempts to interpret Robespierre's life psychologically, as an instance of the perversion of high faculties by wrong choices. The writer makes use, for the first time in English, of much of the new material, especially for Robespierre's early life.

Ording, *Le bureau de police du Comité de Salut Public* (1930) is a study of a little-known aspect of Robespierre's work in connexion with the Terror, essential for a judgement on his responsibility for it.

Books of secondary importance for the study of Robespierre, in this period are:

Mathiez, *Études Robespierristes*, I. *La Conspiration de l'étranger* (1917), II. *La corruption parlementaire sous la Terreur* (1918)—both containing papers on Robespierre; Webster, *The French Revolution* (1919)—interpreting it as an Orléanist conspiracy; Bourgin, *Die französische Revolution* (*Weltgeschichte*, Vol. 8, 1922)—translated from the French; Elton, *The revolutionary idea in France* (1923)—raising the question whether Robespierre was the founder of modern socialism; Hentig, *Robespierre: Studien zur Psychopathologie des Machttriebes* (1924); Bainville, *Histoire de France* (1924)—includes

a monarchist view of the Revolution; Vingtrinier, *La contre-révolution*, 1789-91 (1924-5)—a careful study of an aspect of the Revolution hitherto neglected; Mathiez, *Autour de Robespierre* (1925)—reprinting articles on persons with whom Robespierre had dealings; Brachvogel, *Robespierre* (1925); Zacker, *9 Termidora* (*Le 9 thermidor*, 1926); Bradby, *A short History of the French Revolution* (1926)—a competent narrative, using modern knowledge; Barthou, *Le neuf thermidor* (1926)—anti-Robespierrist; Mathiez, *La vie chère et le mouvement social sous la Terreur* (1927)—important for Robespierre's relations with the *Enragés*; Gaxotte, *La Révolution française* (1928, English translation)—Catholic-royalist; Thompson, *Leaders of the French Revolution* (1928)—with a short study of Robespierre; Gottschalk, *The Era of the French Revolution* (1929)—an interesting survey of 1715-1815, by Mathiez's most expert American follower; Duplay, *Robespierre amant de la Patrie* (1929)—a romance, by a descendant of Robespierre's host; Lecomte, *Au chant de la Marseillaise: Danton et Robespierre* (1929); Łaski, *The Socialist tradition in the French Revolution* (1930); Duplay, *Robespierre chez les Duplay* (1930); Whitham, *A biographical history of the French Revolution* (1930); Mathiez, *Girondins et Montagnards* (1930)—contains several essays bearing on Robespierre; Hazen, *The French Revolution* (1932).

Amongst articles dealing with Robespierre during this period are:

1914. Mathiez, *Les divisions dans les Comités de gouvernement* (R.H. 118/70). Lesueur, *Les origines et la fortune de la famille de Robespierre* (A.R. 7/179). Mathiez, *Robespierre jeune en Franche-Comté* (A.R. 7/309, 8/79).

1916. Mathiez, *Robespierre et l'armée* (A.R. 8/131). Rouanet, *Robespierre d'après les comptes rendus parlementaires en 1789* (A.R. 8/336). Bergounioux, *Robespierre* (A.R. 8/405). *La popularité de Robespierre en 1789* (A.R. 8/720).

1917. Mathiez, *Robespierre et Benjamin Vaughan* (A.R. 9/1). Rouanet, *Robespierre et le journal 'L'Union'* (A.R. 9/145).

Mathiez, *Fouquier-Tinville et Robespierre* (A.R. 9/239).
 Combet, *Les arrêtés de Robespierre jeune* (A.R. 9/314).
 Mathiez, *Babeuf et Robespierre* (A.R. 9/370). Rouanet, *Les séances de la Constituante* (A.R. 9/433, 610, 10/162, 289, 11/62, 195). Lintilhac, *Dans la salle du Manège* (R.F. 70/289).

1918. Mathiez, *Le carnet de Robespierre* (A.R. 10/1).
Documents sur Robespierre et sa famille (A.R. 10/400).

1919. Rouanet, *Michelet et la légende antirobespierriste* (A.R. 11/28). *Robespierre jugé par Napoléon* (A.R. 11/116). *Nouveaux témoignages sur Catherine Théot* (A.R. 11/388). *Le testament de Charlotte Robespierre* (A.R. 11/535). Lévi, *Saint-Just et Robespierre* (R.F. 72/387).

1920. Mathiez, *Robespierre et Aigoin* (A.R. 12/33).
 Vermale, *Joseph le Maistre et Robespierre* (A.R. 12/117).
 Mathiez, *Robespierre terroriste* (A.R. 12/177). Michon, *Robespierre et la guerre* (A.R. 12/265). Hardy, *Robespierre et la question noire* (A.R. 12/357). *Charlotte Robespierre et le 9 thermidor* (A.R. 12/502).

1921. Durieux, *Thermidor* (R.F. 74/150).

1922. *Un témoignage de Bonaparte sur Robespierre* (A.R. 14/60). Mathiez, *Les intrigues contre Robespierre en 1794* (A.R. 14/223).

1923. Chabaud, *Robespierre Défenseur de Marseille* (A.R. 15/113). Mathiez, *L'opposition entre les Girondins et les Montagnards* (A.R. 15/177). *L'hommage d'Arras à Robespierre* (A.R. 15/441).

1924. Mathiez, *Robespierre et Joseph Le Bon* (A.H. 1/1).
 Michon, *La maison de Robespierre* (A.H. 1/64). Mathiez, *Défense de Robespierre* (A.H. 1/97). Dommanget, *Robespierre et les cultes* (A.H. 1/193). Mathiez, *Robespierre à la commune le 9 thermidor* (A.H. 1/289). Michon, *Les séances des 8 et 9 thermidor* (A.H. 1/497).

1925. Stein, *Louis-le-Grand* (R.Q.H. 102/134). *La succession des frères Robespierre* (A.H. 2/172). *Le "Courrier français" de Philadelphie et la mort de Robespierre* (R.F. 78/74).

1926. Michon, *La maison de Robespierre* (A.H. 3/217).
 Mathiez, *Le Comité de Salut Public et le complot de l'étranger* (A.H. 3/305). *Robespierre et la réunion d'Avignon* (A.H. 3/583).

Comptes rendus des séances des Jacobins, 1791 (R.F. 79/151).

1927. Mathiez, *Le 'Neuf Thermidor' de M. Barthou* (A.H. 4/1). Mathiez, *Le Robespierre de M. Lenôtre* (A.H. 4/97). Mathiez, *Les séances des 4 et 5 thermidor* (A.H. 4/193). Mathiez, *L'affaire Legray* (A.H. 4/305).

1928. Héritier, *Robespierre, ou le 'Saint' de la Démocratie* (R.Q.H. 109/313). *Robespierre franc-maçon?* (A.H. 5/62). *Le portrait de Robespierre par Godefroy* (A.H. 5/63). Mathiez, *Les décrets de Ventôse* (A.H. 5/193). Mathiez, *Notes inédites de Blanqui sur Robespierre* (A.H. 5/305). *Le capitaine Linde chez Robespierre* (A.H. 5/457).

1929. Mathiez, *La Révolution française et la théorie de la dictature* (R.H. 161/304). Mathiez, *Robespierre et Vergniaud* (A.H. 6/113, 217). Mathiez, *Robespierre et le procès de Catherine Théot* (A.H. 6/392). Vailland, *Les séances des Jacobins* (A.H. 6/551).

1930. Bouchemakine, *Le neuf thermidor* (A.H. 7/401).

1931. Lefebvre, *La rivalité du Comité de Salut Public et du Comité de Sécurité générale* (R.H. 167/366). Vailland, *Robespierre et les Jacobins de Versailles* (A.H. 8/49). *Les souvenirs de Robespierre à Châlons* (A.H. 8/159). Walter, *Le problème de la dictature jacobine* (A.H. 8/515). *Robespierre et le Gironde au deux Septembre* (R.F. 85/152).

1932. *Un secrétaire de Robespierre* (A.H. 9/163, 462).

1933. Mansuy, *Robespierre vu de Pologne* (A.H. 10/222). Eude, *La Commune robespierriste* (A.H. 10/412, 11/323, 528, 12/132). Thompson, *l'organisation du travail du Comité de Salut Public* (A.H. 10/454). *Le buste de Robespierre à Arras* (A.H. 10/481). Lefebvre, *Discours sur Robespierre* (A.H. 10/492).

1934. *Un petit cousin de Robespierre* (A.H. 11/250). Lemoine, *L'origine du club des Jacobins* (R.F. 87/17).

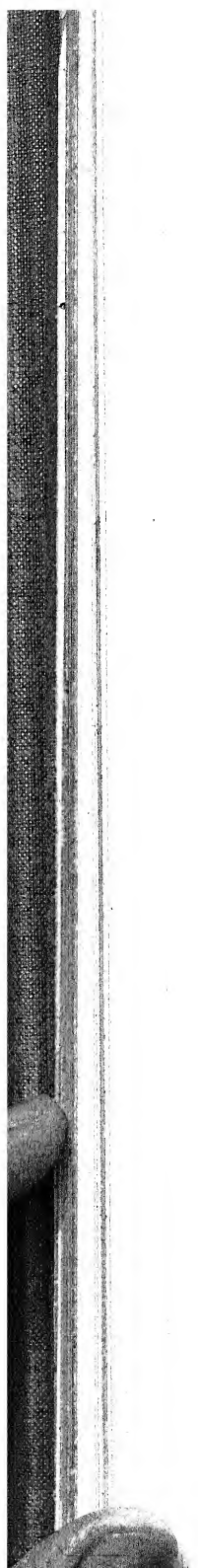
1935. Kerr, *Robespierre et le jeune Millingen* (A.H. 12/38).

XII

Thus, for 140 years, historical opinion about Robespierre and the Revolution has swung to and fro, under the impulse

S U M M A R Y

of personal predilection, or political passion. But two steady influences have gradually come into action—the publication of original sources, and freedom of historical study. The first of these cannot be taken away; the second may be withdrawn, but only for a time. If, at the present moment, intensive and specialized study of the Revolution goes on side by side with superficial and semi-fictional popularization; if impartial judgment of the revolutionary leaders has to contend against distorting propaganda; yet there is a growing consensus of informed opinion, establishing conclusions which will not easily be upset. Such conclusions seem to be: that the French Revolution was not the work of a class or of a clique, but of the whole nation; that all its stages must be judged as parts of a single movement; that the men who, from time to time, were thought to direct this movement, did little more than follow it; and that Robespierre, in particular, owed his repute to the thoroughness with which he realized, expounded, and embodied the revolutionary spirit of the French people.



CHAPTER I

THE STUDENT (1758-1781)

I

MAXIMILIEN MARIE ISIDORE DE ROBESPIERRE was born at Arras on May 6, 1758. His father was Maximilien Barthélemy François de Robespierre, and his mother Jacqueline Marguerite Carraut.

If there was any Irish strain in the Robespierre family; if their name had been corrupted from some original Robert Spiers, Robert's Peter, Rosper, Roper, Rooper, or Roth Fitz Piers; or if there was something Hibernian in Maximilien's character or countenance which might have come from across the Channel;¹ at any rate, the family had been French ever since the fifteenth century. From Gilles de Romespierres, Ronmespierre, or Roumespierre, mentioned in 1429-31, and his grandson Guillaume, whose seal, bearing a coat of arms, appears on a document of 1462, the family name and home can be traced through a continuous line of Robespierres for over 300 years. The early bearers of the name followed many professions. Jean de Rouvespieres (mid-fifteenth century) kept an inn at Paris; Robert was a Prior; Jean served in the King's mounted guard; and whilst Baudouin held ecclesiastical benefices at Cambrai and Hesdin, by appointment of Pope Eugene IV (1431-9), Pierre of Ruitz was a common *laboureur*, who borrowed money from the Municipality, and carried on a small business in the sale of timber and stone. But before long, though now and again a younger son would turn priest or publican, the family settled down in the suburbs of the law, and in that district of north-east France whose corners are

¹The tradition appears in various and sometimes absurd forms in Lewes, Hamel, Michelet, Lamartine, Belloc, and Hayes' *Ireland and Irishmen in the French Revolution*. Cp. N. and Q., 9th Series, 1/183, 295. The earliest biography (Le Blond, 20) says that the family originally came from Belgium.

formed by the towns of Douai, Cambrai, and Arras. Jean, in the early sixteenth century, was *huissier au conseil d'Artois*, and *Auditeur royal* at Bethune; his son Robert combined a clerkship with a small grocery business; his great-grandson, another Robert, was clerk, attorney, and notary-public at Harnes, Henin, and Carvin, near Lens; and Carvin remained the chief home of the family, till finally Maximilien's grandfather and father donned the barrister's gown, and enjoyed a respectable, if not very remunerative practice at Arras, the legal and ecclesiastical capital of Artois.

The grandfather, the first Maximilien, tried to re-establish the family fortunes by marrying an inn-keeper's daughter, who brought him some house property at Arras; and he almost achieved fame when, in 1745, Charles Edward Stuart, the Young Pretender, appointed him one of the first office-holders of the Masonic Lodge with which he rewarded the town for six months' hospitality.¹ Perhaps because he became a man of property, this ancestor made little of the law, and for a long period had no more than two briefs a year. Of his sons and daughters, Maximilien's uncles and aunts, only two play any considerable part in the present history—Marie Marguerite (1735–91), afterwards Mme Deshorties, and Amable Aldegonde Henriette (1736–91), who became Mme Durut.²

From this respectable but undistinguished family Robespierre's father inherited a legal connexion, a scrap of property, a coat of arms, a town house, and the right to put *de* before his name. The two houses in the Place de Chaudronniers and the rue des Bouchers might bring in some 12–15,000 *livres* a year: but property and practice together meant meagre wealth to one of a family of fourteen, with eight children. It was soon necessary to repudiate the payment for an annual *obit* and weekly mass incurred under the will of an ancestress; when Marie Marguerite married, she had no dowry but her furniture; and all that the grand-

¹The document, dated *le jeudi 15^e jour du 2^e mois l'an de l'incarnation 1745*, is given in A.R. 4/113.

²For the complete genealogy, v. A.R. 5/236. The name was spelt Roberpierre, Roberspier, Roberspierre or Robertspier, with or without *de* (Paris, 3).

children ultimately inherited was the inadequate sum of 8,000 *livres*. Robespierre's maternal grandfather was, indeed, a brewer; but the Carraut property disappeared in the payment of debts and bequests.¹ Without money to support them, the family title and arms gave little satisfaction, and both disappeared in the early days of the Revolution.² Robespierre's father, the feckless heir to this fading estate, had been intended by his parents for the religious life, and began a novitiate with the Premonstratensians of Dommartin at the age of seventeen: but finding no vocation there,³ he came home again, read law at Douai, and fell back upon the family profession of barrister, attached to the Conseil d'Artois (1756). Within two years, at the age of twenty-six, he contracted a hasty marriage with Jacqueline Carraut, daughter of Jacques-François Carraut, a brewer, of rue Ronville, and Marie-Marguerite Cornu (January 2, 1758); and Maximilien was born four months later.⁴ Two daughters and another son followed rapidly—Marie Marguerite Charlotte (born on February 8, 1760), Henriette Eulalie Françoise (December 28, 1761), and Augustin Bon Joseph (January 21, 1763); till, with the birth of a fifth child which did not survive, on July 4, 1764, the mother's strength gave out, and she died on July 16, aged 29, leaving four young children, and a memory which, his sister says, Maximilien could never recall without tears.

Always incompetent and impoverished, the widower seems now to have become almost deranged. He failed to sign the registration of his wife's death, or to attend her funeral; and four months later, deserting his family, he took up a temporary post as bailiff to the *seigneur* of Sauchy-Cauchy, near Marquion, north of Cambrai.⁵ After some-

¹Lesueur in A.R. 7/179; Vellay in R.H. 8/148. An inventory of the Carraut property was given by Lavoine in *Avenir d'Arras*, February 17, 1914.

²There is some doubt as to the form of the arms; v. Hamel 1/10, Paris, 6, A.R. 7/106; Mélicocq in *Annales du Nord* 3/6/72. Maximilien signed his name with the *de* as Secretary of the Assembly at the foot of the decree abolishing titles of nobility (June 19, 1790).

³v. *Livre journalier de l'abbaye de Domp Martin* (Paris, 12).

⁴For the register of marriage and baptism, v. Paris, 13.

⁵Le Blond puts his flight before his wife's death, and attributes it to *bizarrie de caractère ou désagrément de profession à la suite d'un procès perdu*.

thing like a year's absence, he was at home again between December, 1765, when he urged his colleagues at the bar to send an address of sympathy to Louis XV during the fatal illness of the Dauphin,¹ and March 22, 1766, when he signed an I.O.U. for 700 livres to his sister Henriette. There follows another absence of two years, and a second re-appearance, in October, 1768, marked, like the first, by a heartless financial expedient; for he borrows a sum of money from his widowed mother, now an inmate of the Convent of *Dames de la Paix*, upon condition of renouncing all claims to the family inheritance. A third absence is proved by evidence of his presence at Mannheim in June, 1770;² and a third return by the reappearance of his name on the records of the Conseil d'Artois between October, 1771, and June, 1772.³ But after that he becomes a legend. The earliest biography, written within a few months of Robespierre's death by someone in close touch with Arras, says that he first went to Belgium, then opened a school for teaching French at Cologne, and finally, disliking this work, set out for London and the West Indies, where he may still have been living in 1795. His daughter Charlotte, who may have known more, but whose recollections were not written down until forty years later, and who had no wish to record his delinquencies, only says that he was advised to travel, and never returned: she does not know where he died.⁴ After 1772, at any rate, he never reappeared at Arras, and left his young family to face the world alone.

II

When his father first disappeared, in 1764, Maximilien was six years old, Charlotte four, Henriette three, and Augustin hardly out of his cradle. When he finally deserted them, eight years later, the two girls had already gone to live with their aunts, Marie and Amable, and the two boys

¹Letter to Baudet, December 9 (A.H., 1924, 72).

²Lavoine, *La famille de Robespierre* (R.H.R.F. 8/47).

³A.H. 1/568.

⁴Le Blond, 21; Charlotte, 188. Cp. an anonymous local biography quoted by Mathiez in A.H. 1/568.

with their grandparents, the Carrauts. In December, 1768, Charlotte was sent to a girls' school at Tournai, where she learnt house-keeping, needle-work, and religion. In June, 1773, she was followed there by her sister Henriette.¹

In 1766 Maximilien, who had learnt to read, and taught himself to write, went to school, at the age of eight, as a day-boy, at the Collège d'Arras, a richly-endowed foundation of the sixteenth century, whose management, since the expulsion of the Jesuits, had been in the hands of the bishop of the diocese, and of a local committee, whilst the teaching was given by secular priests of the Oratorian order; the Principal was M. de la Borère. Here, with some 400 other boys, most of whom belonged, as he did, to the professional classes of the district, he learnt the rudiments of Latin.² Charlotte, with sisterly partiality, says that young Maximilien was hard-working, serious-minded, amiable, just, and popular, and that his progress astonished his masters; but that he took little part in school recreations, and spent long hours in solitude and meditation.³ Le Blond simply remarks that his success owed more to patience than to genius; and records the inflexibility (*raideur*) of his character. One old schoolfellow remembered him, in after years, as 'the conventional good boy'; another wrote that he had a detestable character, and an inordinate love of domination;⁴ but when we notice that the favourable verdict belongs to the time of Robespierre's popularity (1793), and the unfavourable (1794) to the month after his fall, we shall not attach too much importance to them. It is likely enough, in any case, that his cramped and unhappy childhood had left a mark. The death of his mother, and the desertion of his father, when he was only a child, had turned him, his sister says,

¹Charlotte, 21.

²In 1919 a British officer found in a ruined cottage on the Somme, and gave to the Bodleian, a *Catalogue des Écoliers du Collège académique de l'Abbaye Royale de Saint Vaast . . . de l'année 1764*; among the names of Robespierre's schoolfellows (not all his contemporaries) are Damiens, Lebas, Legay, Lenglet, Paris, and three English names—Fleming, Ledwich and Lock. The fact that Robespierre had a schoolfellow named Damiens may have suggested the royalist legend that he was descended from Louis XV's assassin (v. 1/xvi).

³Charlotte, 21.

⁴Fleischmann, 26.

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from a normally cheerful boy (*étourdi, turbulent, léger*) into a sedate and conscientious young head of his family (*posé, raisonnable, laborieux*), who spoke seriously to his younger brother and sisters, and only joined in their games to show how they should be played. His own taste was for books and birds, and it is said that his mother had taught him to make lace.¹ When his sisters paid their Sunday visits to the Carrauts they were allowed to handle his tame pigeons and sparrows; and once even to take one home; but never again, for it died of neglect; and when he went to College he left his collection of pictures and other treasures with his family, but his birds were given to a girl friend, who could be trusted to look after them.²

The inevitable background of this rather austere childhood was religion—religion enforced by daily prayers at the Abbey school; religion—if only the building of toy chapels—encouraged at home by the aunts, who enjoyed a reputation for piety, and by their clerical friends; and religion made magnificent in the cathedral itself, where young Maximilien is said to have played his part in the drama of the mass, *en tunique blanche*, as acolyte or server.³

III

The boy's progress at school was so promising that after three years, at the age of eleven, he was given a scholarship to the University of Paris. This was one of four *bourses* remaining in the gift of the Abbot of Saint-Vaast since the recent incorporation of the fourteenth-century Collège d'Arras in

¹Charlotte, 188, Paris 17.

²Charlotte, 190. Hamel finds the story touching, Croker absurd. Lenôtre's discovery that no birdcages are mentioned in the Carraut bill of sale hardly proves that it is untrue. The Dehay letter (Corresp. 4) shows that Robespierre still kept canaries, twenty years later. It was doubtless this taste that suggested to his enemies the story that he used to amuse himself by cutting off birds' heads in a toy guillotine. The legend gained credence from the fact that in the summer of 1794 the *agent national* at Arras confiscated a toy guillotine, in which some children were decapitating birds and mice. (Lecesne, *Arras sous la Révolution*, 3/18.) The *Conventionnel* Lejeune was also accused of keeping a toy guillotine with which he decapitated chickens and cut up fruit for his table (R.F. 41/513). The girl friend was probably Mlle Dehay.

³Ward, 274; Esquiros 1/195, on the authority of Charlotte, who afterwards denied it (A.H. 1920, 153).

the Collège Louis-le-Grand, and it provided free board and teaching throughout a course of some ten years.

Robespierre's career at Louis-le-Grand began in October, 1769. This great building, with its gloomy entrance gateway on the rue Saint-Jacques, its eight quadrangles, its Hall, Chapel, and lecture-rooms, and its insufficient supply of bath-rooms and lavatories, was not unlike an Oxford college. Its 200 scholars (*boursiers*) and its increasing crowd of boarders (*pensionnaires*) and day-boys (*externes*) were under the supervision of a Principal, a Vice-Principal, and a staff of twenty-three resident masters, whilst the lecturing was done by non-resident *professeurs*.¹ There were three principals during Robespierre's ten years—Gardin du Mesnil (1770), author of works on the principles of rhetoric, and Latin synonyms; Poignard d'Enthieuloye, who resigned, after a few years' rule (1778), with most of his staff, leaving the College heavily in debt; and Denis Bérardier, a tolerant man, with political ambitions, who threw up academic life in 1789 to become a deputy in the National Assembly. Of these, Bérardier alone seems to have influenced Robespierre. Their friendship outlasted school days; and when his old pupil Desmoulins married, Bérardier officiated, and Maximilien signed the register.

In Robespierre's time the scholars were no longer distinguished from the commoners by being differently dressed and worse fed; but they were still at some disadvantage compared with richer boys, who might live in comparative comfort, keep a servitor, and look down on the mere recipients of charity. Robespierre, one of the poorest boys in the school, was driven to save money upon clothes, in order to spend it at the barber's, or the bookshop: in 1775, and again in 1778, he had to apply to his *Préfet d'études* for a decent suit of clothes in which to present an address to Louis XVI, or pay his respects to his patron, the Bishop of Arras.²

But at school poverty is no bar to friendship. During his first two years in Paris, Maximilien could take refuge from

¹Eymond, *Histoire du Collège de Louis-le-Grand*; Paris; Stein in R.Q.H. 102/134.

²Proyart 22; Corresp. 2 (April 11, 1778).

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the difficulties of his new life in the rooms of his relation, M. Delaroche, a canon of Nôtre-Dame; his death, in 1771, threw the boy back on his school companions, of whom the closest seems to have been a clever and attractive boy from Guise, two years younger than himself, named Camille Desmoulins; others who afterwards made some name in the world were Fréron, Duport-Dutertre, Suleau, and a *boursier* from Noyon named Le Brun. In the days of Robespierre's power a man named Dubois wrote to remind him that they had gone up the school side by side; and the diplomatic Abbé Noel admitted to a slight acquaintance.¹

With every motive for working, and few interests outside school, Robespierre made steady, even brilliant progress in classics. Between 1769 and 1776 the name of Ludovicus Franciscus Maximilianus Maria Isidorus de Robespierre, Atrebas (i.e., of Arras) figures six times in the annual prize-lists, for successes in Latin and Greek verse and translation; and by 1775 he was so evidently the best classical scholar of his year that he was chosen to deliver a Latin speech of welcome to Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, when they visited the College on the way back from their coronation at Rheims: an eyewitness noticed that the King looked kindly at the boy who was one day to demand his death.² This proficiency, indeed, owed less to natural genius than to a capacity for taking pains. 'He was a hard worker,' says one of his teachers, 'but heavy in hand, like an ox at the plough';³ and laboriousness became the method of everything that he undertook.

Of Robespierre's non- or post-classical studies little is known. To Hamel it seems self-evident that 'Hérivaux's favourite pupil' should write essays 'breathing a kind of Stoic morality, and a zeal for freedom,' and he transfers to Robespierre the nickname which, for his enthusiasm for Latin oratory, had been given to Hérivaux himself—'le Romain';⁴ just as, in Charlotte's sisterly imagination, he 'always carried off the first prize'. More is to be learnt,

¹Pap. Inéd. 1/154; Corresp. 449; Gower 393.

²Le Blond, 48; Proyard, 22.

³A.H. 1931, 161.

⁴Le Blond, 46. The mistake has been repeated in all later biographies.

perhaps, from a passage in his friend Desmoulins' *Révolutions de France et de Brabant*, in which, speaking of their school-days, he reminds Robespierre how, under professors who taught them to hate their own government, they learnt the love of liberty, and longed to know how France might be freed.¹ Under such influences they grew up, like many more of their generation, to read Voltaire, Raynal, Rousseau, and other authors of the Enlightenment, whose corrupting works (*mauvaises livres*) were, according to Royou, smuggled into College by the hair-dresser, or the lavatory attendant.² Robespierre's 'head was full of Rousseau'; and one day, not long before 1778, there was a visit to the attic in which Jean-Jacques himself was nearing his end. 'I saw you,' wrote Maximilien some years afterwards, 'during your last days, and the memory remains a source of joy and pride. I contemplated your august features, and saw on them the marks of the dark disappointments to which you were condemned by the injustice of mankind.'³

IV

What kind of character did Robespierre bear at College? There are two accounts, and they are barely reconcilable. One comes from his biographer Le Blond, his almoner Proyard, and his schoolfellow Fréron; the other from his sister Charlotte. 'He was the same at College,' says Fréron, 'as he was in later days—melancholy, morose, and liverish; jealous of his comrades' successes; never taking part in their games, but going for solitary walks, striding along, in the manner of a dreamer and an invalid. There was nothing young about him. His restless face already showed the convulsive grimaces we came to know so well. Silent, reserved, unbending, secretive, his most marked qualities were a self-centred *amour-propre*, invincible stubbornness, and fundamental dishonesty. I can't remember ever seeing him smile.

¹Clarétie, *Camille Desmoulins*, 21 f.; B. and R. 26/271; cp. Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, 1/151.

²A.H., 1931, 161; Le Blond, 37.

³*Dédicace à Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, v. Charlotte, 290. This composition (which internal evidence suggests dates from 1791) is the only real evidence for the incident.

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If anyone offended him he never forgot it. Vindictive and treacherous, he had already learnt to dissimulate his resentment.¹ Le Blond says that a certain Mme Mercier of Arras, when sending a son of her own to Louis-le-Grand, wrote expressing her anxiety lest he should have anything to do with 'young Robespierre (*le jeune Robespierre*), who, between ourselves, promises to turn out a bad lot'; and goes on to describe him as a silent, conceited, unpopular boy, who cared nothing for morality, and resented the practice of it by others.²

This evidence is highly suspect. Fréron, one of the gang which had just overthrown Robespierre, supplied his reminiscences as material for Courtois' anti-Robespierrist *rapport*. Le Blond was a Catholic royalist refugee who hated everything to do with the Revolution. Proyart was an *émigré* priest who had no reason for sparing either the apostle of the Supreme Being, or the author of his exile; and Mme Mercier's objection, if it really refers to Maximilien, and not to his younger brother Augustin, may only mean that she had been shocked by his liberal and sceptical way of talking when he spent an occasional holiday at Arras.

On the other hand, Charlotte's account of her brother's college days turns him into the conventional hero of school-boy fiction. 'I have been told,' Laponneraye makes her say, 'that he was popular both with boys and masters. . . . During the whole of his time at College his temper was so quiet and even that he never quarrelled with his companions; whilst he made himself the champion of the younger boys against the elder, spoke up for them, and even used his fists to defend them, when his eloquence was ineffective.'³ It is always Charlotte's thesis that her brother championed the cause of the oppressed, whether against the school bully, or the injustice of the law, or the tyranny of the state. We cannot prove that she is romancing, but it is probable that the present passage is another example of this amiable apologetic.

¹Pap. Inéd. 1/154. This is apparently the source of the unfavourable account given in *Vie secrète politique et curieuse de M. J. M. Robespierre* (Brit. Mus.).

²Le Blond, 25.

³Charlotte, 193.

V

In one subject—that of religion—we are on firmer ground. Robespierre went to College a conventional, if not a convinced Catholic; he left it a conventional, if not a convinced sceptic. Side by side with the classical and philosophical teaching at Louis-le-Grand, and affecting it at every turn, was the Catholic system, with its daily Offices and Mass, compulsory monthly Confession, Communion (at least) at all the great Festivals, and the Retreats that opened every Academic Year. Maximilien's first term at College was marked by the death, at the age of sixteen, of a pious young scholar, J. M. L. G. Décalogue de la Perrie, the story of whose edifying life was published soon afterwards by Robespierre's almoner, the abbé Proyart, and became a classic guide to the devout.¹ In his early years at school it must have been difficult to resist the pressure of official piety, and he was at one time a fairly frequent communicant. But, as he grew up, and his experience widened, Robespierre went through a change of mind which was hardly less common then than it is now; and though he never quite shook off his clerical traditions, he admitted in after years that 'he had been a pretty poor Catholic ever since his time at College'.² In a highly rhetorical passage, based perhaps on Proyart's reminiscences, but coloured by his own intolerance, Le Blond thus describes this change. 'Of all the practices obligatory in an educational establishment,' he writes, 'none seemed more difficult or uncongenial to Robespierre than those of a specially religious character. . . . Prayer and sermons, services and confession, were equally hateful to him, and he did his duties in this respect with a heart full of resentment. As he could not escape attendance at religious exercises, he took part in them quite lifelessly. He held, as he was bound, the Book of Hours in his hand, but without turning the pages. When his companions prayed, his lips were closed;

¹*L'Écolier vertueux, ou Vie édifiante d'un Écolier de l'Université de Paris* (E.T., The Virtuous Scholar).

²Speech at the Jacobins, 1793, v. 1/215.

when they sang, he was silent. Even in the midst of the Holy Mysteries, and at the foot of the altar bearing the Sacred Victim, where any external irreverence would have been remarked, it was easy to see that his thoughts and interests were far away from the God he was asked to adore.¹ When, later, as a senior, he was no longer obliged to communicate, he ceased to do so altogether. During Retreats he made no attempt to hide his boredom. If his confessor, the abbé Asseline, sometimes reduced him to tears, this unaccustomed emotion was a sign of pain rather than penitence.¹

Conventional we have called it, rather than convinced scepticism. There is, at any rate, little evidence that, at any period of his life, Robespierre was sufficiently interested in the dogmatic side of Catholicism to think out a position for himself in isolation, or against odds: everything suggests that he was more likely to share a fashionable reaction against the orthodoxy of the previous generation—a reaction which was not inconsistent, in his case, with the survival of a genuine belief in an overruling Providence, or with the pursuit of an almost Puritanical moral discipline.

It was here that Louis-le-Grand left its most lasting mark. It may fairly be assumed that the abbé Proyart's *Vie de l'écolier vertueux* and *Modèle des jeunes gens* were seldom read by his pupils except with derision, and that the morbidly devotional life recommended by the pious author did not find much following among Robespierre's school-fellows: but the disciplinary system inculcated in his *Instruction en forme de règlement pour les maîtres de quartier* was the inescapable frame-work of their daily lives. In school as in chapel, in hall and in dormitory, alike during games and country walks, the *maître de quartier* was always in attendance, to enforce good order and good manners, and to prevent, by every means short of deliberate spying, the entrance of wolves into the fold. In school, each boy had

¹Le Blond, 31. This change seems to have coincided with that from an oppressively pietist régime under d'Enthieuloye and Proyart to the more liberal Principalship of Bérardier, when Robespierre was just twenty.

his desk, at which he sat for work, and in which he kept his books and writing materials, his private possessions, and the *peignoir* he wore for the daily hair-dressing. It was the duty of the master to keep silence during 'prep.', to give good or bad marks for behaviour, to send in weekly reports to the Principal, and to look through the desks, from time to time, for 'bad' books or pictures. In Hall he must always be present, to enforce order and good manners, see that the senior boys waited, as they sometimes did, on the juniors, and arrange for the reading of some work of piety. At night-time he went round the dormitories, to see that every boy was in his own *alcove*, properly washed and bedded, with his clothes tidily folded up, before putting out the lights. During recreation times his duties were particularly severe. The boys were turned loose in the school garden, to play at ball games, which he must supervise, with the constant anxiety lest *des enfans pétulans* may hurt each other, *les mécontents* break the rules, or really *mauvais sujets* get together for worse purposes. Even a Décalogue might run out into the street, against rules, to see the passing of a religious procession. On holidays there would be walks, still under the eye of a master, to the *maison de campagne* attached to the school, or, as a special treat, to the Invalides, or other 'sights' of Paris; the boys might even be given extra pocket-money, to buy fruit, or to give to a beggar; but they must be kept away from river-banks, frozen ponds, eating-houses, and other dangerous places; and care must be taken to see that they do not steal fruit, damage crops, or molest the peasantry. This rigorous system, enforced for more than nine months of the year, might be resented, but could hardly be resisted; and, whilst it turned some boys into malcontents, others became prigs.

VI

Robespierre's speech of welcome to Louis XVI so fired his literary ambitions that, about the time of his promotion from Rhetoric to Philosophy (January, 1776), he con-

templated entering for a prize for an Encomium on Louis XII, and wrote to M. Target, a well-known Paris lawyer, asking for a copy of a recent address by M. de Saint-Lambert to the *Académie française*. Two or three years later he has finished his 'undergraduate' course, and is embarking on his chosen 'post-graduate' study of Law. Once more he appeals to a leader of the Paris bar—Dupaty, author of a book on criminal law—for advice as to his reading. 'I want to be a lawyer,' he writes. 'I know how many qualities are needed for fame in that profession. One at least I can claim to possess—keen ambition, and an unqualified desire for success.'¹

But what was the sequel to this letter, and exactly where and how Robespierre pursued his study of the law, remains a little obscure. Montjoie, a hostile traditionalist, asserts that when Maximilien was sixteen or seventeen (and this is, at any rate, several years too soon), 'two of his relations who were in Paris advised him to take up the study of law, and to join the Paris bar'; and that they arranged with Ferrières, a well-known barrister, to take him into his chambers for this purpose. When the time came for him to practise, the story goes on, one of Robespierre's 'benefactors' came to see Ferrières, and was told that Maximilien's performances at College flattered his abilities, that he had 'a poor head, with little sense or judgment in it', and that he had better begin his legal career at Arras, where his name would help him, rather than in Paris. So he went back to Arras, 'nursing in his heart shame, scorn, and schemes of revenge.'² A rather different account, but one equally tainted by dislike, occurs in Brissot's *Memoirs*, in a passage describing his own legal training in Paris. 'Before leaving the subject of Nolleau's chambers,' he writes, 'I must recall the fact that chance gave me there, as second clerk, a man who has since played an amazing part in the Convention, but against whose future celebrity I should at that time have been prepared to bet anything. Ignorant, without knowledge of any scientific

¹Corresp. 3.

²Montjoie, *Histoire de la conjuration de Maximilien Robespierre*.

subject, incapable of conceiving or expressing an idea of any kind, he was eminently fitted for a career of dishonesty'. Now Brissot was in chambers with Nolleau *père* during the later months of 1774, and subsequently with Nolleau *fils*, and with one Aucante, who in turn inherited the practice, till 1778; whereas Robespierre cannot have begun to study law until 1778 at the earliest; whilst there is no other evidence that he did so at 'Nolleau's'. The most, therefore, that can be allowed, of this very misleading reference, is that the two young lawyers may just have met one another.¹ Again, the layer of truth, if there is any, underlying the unfavourable account of Robespierre's abilities, in which both witnesses agree, is that, though he learnt his law in Paris, he never practised there. But there was nothing unusual or surprising in this. What he learnt from his books, and from Ferrières, was theoretical, rather than practical. It enabled him to take his degree in Law, and to have his name inscribed on the roll of the Paris Parlement.² But there is no safe evidence that he ever intended this for more than a formality; and within three months—too soon for any final failure of hopes in Paris—we find him admitted to practise at the Arras bar.

It may be that Lewes is justified in assuming that, during part of this period, Robespierre 'led a life of honourable poverty, seclusion, and study' in 'a small apartment *au cinquième* in the rue Saint-Jacques';³ but in fact we have no evidence on the point; nor is there any reason to suppose that he left the College, which had been his home for so many years.

On July 19, 1781, upon a report from the Principal that spoke of Robespierre's 'outstanding abilities', his 'good conduct for twelve years', and his 'successes both at University prize-givings and in his examinations in Philosophy

¹Brissot, *Mémoires*, I/160. Perroud, the editor, supposes that they may have met at Aucante's when Brissot revisited Paris in 1780-2.

²His *diplôme de baccalauréat en droit* was dated July 30, 1780, and his *diplôme de licence*, May 15, 1781. On August 2, 1781, he was *reçu avocat au Parlement de Paris*. Croker's failure to find his name on the official list (308) might be accounted for by the fact that he never practiced.

³Lewes, 12.

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and Law', he was awarded a leaving prize (*gratification*) of the almost unprecedented amount of 600 livres;¹ and his *bourse* at Louis-le-Grand was passed on to his brother Augustin.

¹The document is printed in Fleischmann, 26.

CHAPTER II

THE LAWYER (1781-1789)

I

FOR a short part of each year the religious discipline of Louis-le-Grand was relaxed, and, to the regret of the abbé Proyart, most of the boys returned to the corrupting influences of their homes. During this annual summer vacation of five to eight weeks Robespierre no doubt went back to Arras, where he would stay with his grandparents, the Carrauts, dine with his friend Aymé, who helped to pay his expenses at College, and see as much as he could of his sisters, when they too were at home from school.¹ But soon these happy arrangements were broken by fresh troubles that fell on the unlucky orphans. The marriage of both aunts in 1776-7, and the deaths of M. and Mme Carraut in 1775-8, threw them upon the world again. Amable, indeed, now Mme Durut, seems to have given a temporary home to the two girls; whilst, under M. Carraut's will, half the proceeds of the sale of the family brewery (amounting to 8,262 livres) were settled upon the four grandchildren, to provide for their education, and to give them a start in life.² But in March, 1780, before these provisions could take effect, Robespierre's younger sister, Henriette, died at school, and M. Durut forced Augustin Carraut, the residuary legatee, to refund him, out of her legacy, which now reverted to the estate, a debt of 800 *livres* that her father had never paid. Maximilien resented this action, and determined to make himself independent of the family. For a year after his

¹The vacation was fixed by each college to suit its own members, and usually lasted from forty to sixty days, covering vintage-time, when many of the boys could make themselves useful at home, and ending in October (A.H. 1925/67).

²R.H.R.F. 8/147, A.H. 1914/182: There seems to be a slight variation in the figures for the whole legacy and its four parts.

return from Paris he kept house with his sister Charlotte, who had now left school, in the rue du Saumon. But their shares of the Carraut estate, his bonus from Louis-le-Grand, and his first earnings at the bar, were not enough to finance such independence; and in the autumn of 1782 he was forced to pocket his pride, give a receipt for the tiny residue of Henriette's legacy, and accept an offer of rooms at the Duruts'.

II

Those who have known Arras only as a blackened heap of ruins, or as a reconstructed war-memorial, find it difficult to visualize the place as Robespierre knew it in 1781. One of the oldest towns of northern France, named after a pre-Roman tribe, with traditions going back to the eleventh century, and a history of successive allegiances to kings of France, dukes of Burgundy, and Holy Roman Emperors, it was still a notable centre of Church life, of politics, and of the law. Its mediæval walls, with gates, ditch, and draw-bridge; its citadel, one of the strongest in France; its Grande Place, an immense square surrounded by arcaded and gabled house-fronts; its Petite Place, shadowed by the Sainte Chapelle, the Chapelle des Ardents, and the sixteenth-century Hôtel de Ville; its narrow, winding streets under the walls of the newly-rebuilt Abbey of Saint-Vaast; and the evidences of its trade in grain, lace, and porcelain, were full of interest either for a student of human nature, or for a lover of the picturesque. Robespierre must have known every corner of the place. Born in the rue Saint-Géry, off the Petite Place, he had spent his childhood at the brewery in the rue Ronville, near the south wall. As a young lawyer he often left his temporary home in the rue du Saumon, in the same quarter of the town, to attend to his duties at the Hôtel de Ville. Between 1782 and 1789 we find him living at three other addresses—till '86 at the Duruts' house in the rue des Teinturiers, opposite the abbey, then in the rue des Jésuites (later du Collège) in the south-west quarter, and finally in the house, which still bears his name and memorial,

in the rue des Rapporteurs, near the centre of the town.¹ But the social atmosphere in which he was enclosed was almost as stuffy as the dark rooms that closed their shutters against the noise and dust of the streets; and the liberal sentiments of Louis-le-Grand were grafted on the narrow interests of a provincial society. So far as one can judge, Robespierre had little artistic or sympathetic regard for the world round him. His adventures were inside himself, and the people he met were hardly more than helps or hindrances in the pursuit of his chosen career.

III

Charlotte Robespierre has left a detailed account of the daily routine of the household in the rue des Rapporteurs. Maximilien was generally up by six or seven, and at work till eight, when the *perruquier* came to dress his hair.² Then a bowl of bread and milk (*laitage*), and more work till ten, when he would dress, and walk to the Palais de Justice for the day's cases. Some time in the afternoon followed a light dinner, with wine mixed with water, fruit, and coffee. Then an hour's walk, or a visit to a friend, and another spell of work till seven or eight. The rest of the evening would be spent with the family, or friends. Charlotte represents her brother as 'naturally cheerful' in society, and even as capable of 'laughing till he cried'; but he often had distraught moods, when he would sit in a corner of the room, during card-play or conversation, deep in thought; and sometimes

¹The street (named from a fourteenth-century inn-sign *Au Rat Porteur*) and the house, a rather tall building of two floors, appear in Boffard's plan of Arras (1756). The house, which bore on its front the date 1730, belonged then, and in 1787, when Robespierre took it, to the deFétel family. A bill of sale of 1830 describes it as built round a court, with cellars; on the ground floor a dining-room, sitting-room, ante-room, and kitchen; above, bedrooms and attics. The house survived the bombardment of 1914-8, but has since been rebuilt; and on October 14, 1923, a tablet was placed on it, with the inscription, *Maximilien Robespierre habita cette maison de 1787 à 1789* (Paris; Lesueur, *Introd. to Oeuvres*; R.H.R.F. 7/175, 15/447).

²Always particular about the setting and powdering of his hair, Robespierre spent little, at this time, on his clothes. Among the Advielle MSS. in the Arras Town Library is a contemporary account-book of Duplessis, a draper and glove-maker in the Petite Place. It shows Robespierre and Carnot among its customers; and Robespierre's purchases are few and inexpensive (Fleischmann, 199).

fits of absent-mindedness, such as he never outgrew.¹ His temper was equable; 'he never contradicted people, but fell in with their plans, so that his aunts said he was an angel', with 'every moral virtue', and fated to be the dupe of more designing men. An old lady at Arras told Hamel that her mother often danced with him, and found him a pleasant partner. At the same time, with all his 'amenity of manners', he showed 'energy and inflexibility' of character; he 'never deviated an inch from his principles'; and 'whilst all the world changed around him, he alone remained unshakable in his convictions'. Comparing him with his younger brother, Charlotte makes the interesting admission that Augustin, though not so hard-working, was the more talented of the two; and adds that, whilst Maximilien had more *courage civil*, Augustin surpassed him in *courage militaire*. In appearance the younger brother was 'tall and well-made', with a face 'full of nobility and good features', whereas the elder 'was of moderate height, with a delicate complexion', and a face that 'expressed kindness and goodness' and 'almost always bore a smile', but 'was not handsome in the same regular way'.

Once again a sister's portrait needs correction by a more impartial pen. Maximilien's appearance at this time, according to a legal acquaintance, 'was quite undistinguished (*commun*); he was not above middle height, he had a small head upon broad shoulders, his hair was of a light chestnut colour (*châtain-blond*), his face round, his skin slightly marked with small-pox, his nose small and short, his eyes blue, and rather sunken, his glance shifty, and his manner cold, almost repellent; he seldom smiled, and that only sarcastically.'²

The inconsistencies of these accounts are not, perhaps, so serious as might appear. A man who is nervous and suspicious in public may be easy and amiable at home; and the smile which an aunt thinks angelic, may strike a casual

¹Once, Charlotte says, he helped the soup onto the table-cloth; and once, returning with her from a call, walked on ahead, shut himself in his room, and, when she came in, asked where she had been.

²Devienne, in MS. notes supplied to Paris by M. Hippolyte Renard.

acquaintance as sarcastic or hypocritical, or even be described by an enemy as a grimace.

IV

Amongst Robespierre's special friends at Arras were several young lawyers—Lenglet, Leducq, and Charamond; Devic, formerly a *professeur* at Louis-le-Grand, and now a canon at the Abbey; Aymé, another of the canons, an old family friend; Ansart, a doctor; and 'Barometer' Buissart—a lawyer, twenty years older than himself, who got his nickname from his interest in Natural Science, with whom, as well as his wife, Maximilien kept up a correspondence all through his political career.¹ Through Durut, who was medical officer to the Oratorian College, and lived, rent free, in a house close by, Robespierre resumed friendly relations with the teachers at his old school, and was sometimes invited to lecture to the boys, at the end of the school year. He chose historical subjects, and his lectures on Henri IV, Switzerland, and the Salis-Samade regiment, then in garrison at Arras, were not forgotten by those who heard them.²

Through the influence of Buissart, and another friend, Dubois de Fosseux, Robespierre was elected, within two years of his return to his native place, a member of the Académie royale des belles-lettres, where the thirty 'best brains' of the town and district met, sometimes amidst public applause, to read papers and hold discussions on matters of literary, legal and scientific interest. His inaugural speech (1784) was an attack on the tradition by which a criminal's family suffered for his crime; he afterwards worked it up into a prize essay for a competition at Metz. As Director of the Academy, in 1786, he delivered another oration on the Law of Bastardy, and made a complimentary speech to Mlle Kéralio,³ in which he maintained that woman's contribution to academic discussion is the natural complement of man's; that the presence of the other sex (witness the history of chivalry) incites men to greater efforts; and in short, that

¹R.F. 21/380.

²A.H. 1928/470.

³She afterwards married Robert, editor of the *Mercur National*.

the Academy should be co-educational. In 1786 he read a paper on Criminal Law, and in January, 1789, spoke at a special meeting in honour of the new governor, the Duc de Guines. His last attendance was in February, 1789.

What did membership of the Academy mean to Robespierre? It was a tribute to his abilities as a student and a speaker. It gave him social and professional status. It kept alive interests which might otherwise have been submerged in the routine of legal practice. It enabled him to form friendships which might, indeed, have been even more valuable, had not his tastes, and the urgency of the times, drawn him from the bar to politics, and made him a bitter enemy of the academic point of view.

But perhaps the most important effect of Robespierre's association with the Academicians of Arras was the fresh stimulus that it gave to his literary ambitions. Without this, he would hardly have composed the series of prize essays which, in the development of his ideas and style, form the connecting link between his *Juvenilia* and his later political speeches and articles. We have seen how his early aptitude for Latin oratory turned his attention to the *Éloge*, a species of composition always congenial to the academic mind, and never more so than in an age that is living on its past. Thus it was that he seized the opportunities afforded by the system of Academic competitions, and, like other clever young men of his time, made his first bids for literary fame.

V

The *Discours sur les peines infamantes*, based upon Robespierre's inaugural address to the Arras Academy, was sent in for a prize offered by the Société royale des Sciences et Arts de Metz. It was placed second by the judges, the first prize being awarded to Lacretelle. It was subsequently printed at Amsterdam; and the original manuscript, in Robespierre's own hand, can still be seen amongst the archives of the Metz Academy.¹

¹The British Museum copy (Amsterdam, 1785, sold by Meriquot at Paris) is nicely printed, with a wood-cut head-piece, and one or two corrections in ink,

The questions set were (1) What is the origin of the view that the shame of a crime attaches to the criminal's family, as well as to himself? (2) Is this opinion harmful? and (3) If so, what is the remedy? Robespierre's main correntions are—(1) The feeling in question is an extension of that which leads us to regard all individuals as involved in, and involving, their families and fellow-citizens; (2) Its effects depend to a great extent upon the character of the government; for instance, under a despotism, with arbitrary justice, the disgrace of crime is less than under a democracy, where justice is fairly administered. (3) On the other hand, in a democratic state the dignity of the individual is so much enhanced that he does not suffer at second hand for the disrepute of others, or he can wipe out the stain by an act of free heroism. In any case he will have been trained to despise personal feelings, when compared with the good of his country. And here we find Robespierre already expressing the faith which became the basis of his republican creed ten years later. 'The mainspring of energy (*ressort*) in a republic,' he writes, 'as has been proved by the author of *L'Esprit des Lois*, is *vertu*, that is to say, political virtue, which is simply the love of one's laws and of one's country; and it follows from the very nature of these that all private interests and all personal relationships must give way to the general good. Every citizen has a share in the sovereign power . . . and therefore cannot acquit his dearest friend, if the safety of the state requires his punishment. A man of high principle will be ready to sacrifice to the State his wealth, his life, his very self (*nature*)—everything, indeed, except his honour.' (4) The feeling in question attaches itself, like other disabilities of the feudal and monarchical order of society, only to the unprivileged classes. (5) As to the utility of this feeling, Robespierre adopts a Jewish view of Providence, and of the rewards of righteousness.

apparently in Robespierre's own hand. The MS. is on forty pages of blue paper, of which thirty-five are covered with writing. On p. 36 is fixed, under the seal of the Society, the letter containing Robespierre's name and motto. His letter accepting the award (400 *livres*), and saying that he intends to spend it on the printing of his Essay, may be read in A.H. 5/269.

'Of all moral maxims,' he writes, 'the most profound is that which says that honesty is the best policy. . . . Virtue produces happiness as the sun produces light. Crime results in unhappiness as certainly as filthy insects issue from the heart of corruption'; and this, he thinks, is as true of nations as it is of individuals. Crime, then, will be prevented by wise laws, and by public virtue, more effectively than by punishment, or by any social stigma attaching to the family of a criminal. (6) Robespierre paints an affecting picture of the unhappiness caused by this social stigma—had he not suffered himself from the disrepute of his father's debts and desertion?—and describes the fatal political results of putting whole families on their trial. (7) What, then, is the remedy? Not, he thinks, a wholesale change of the law; nor any extension of paternal authority, though that is 'the most powerful check on corruption'; but rather such minor reforms as abolishing the confiscation of a criminal's property, and the legal disabilities of bastards; extending the privilege of decapitation—'a punishment to which we have come to attach a sort of *éclat*'—to all classes; encouraging the King to include in his charities the distressed families of criminals; and educating public opinion by such means as the present inquiry. 'Reason and eloquence—those are the weapons with which to attack such prejudices as this; and in an age like ours they cannot fail to be successful'.

The judges who read this Essay reported that it was 'well written, but without much feeling'; they allowed that it showed 'neatness, facility, and conciseness'; but they thought that the argument needed further development in certain directions. Its interest to a biographer of Robespierre lies rather in the degree to which it anticipates the writer's later sentiments, if not his ultimate acts.

VI

In 1784, for the fourth year in succession (there had been three failures to award) the Academy of Amiens offered a prize for an *Éloge* of the poet Gresset, the graceful author of

Vert-Vert, whom Voltaire had honoured with an epigram, and Louis XVI with a patent of nobility.¹ Robespierre, encouraged by his partial success at Metz, but doubtful whether he had set about the work in the best way, consulted his friend Buissart, as he had consulted Target in earlier days, as to what form of treatment was most likely to appeal to the judges. Buissart wrote to Sellier, at that time Professor of Mathematics at Amiens, as well as Architect to the Crown, and Director of the local School of Arts and Commerce. Sellier, in reply, enclosed a *Notice sur Gresset* supplied by a M. Baron, and some stories of his own about the poet; but he did not wish it to be known that they came from him. 'The *Éloge*,' he writes, 'that will win the prize will have to be dictated by Gresset's friends; for he is never spoken of here except with veneration, and they think it a crime if one expresses any doubts as to his celebrity'. Buissart evidently passed on this advice; but though Robespierre laid on flattery as thickly as he could, he still failed to win the prize. 'O Gresset,' he wrote, 'you were a great poet, but you were also a gentleman; and, whilst praising your works, I need never be ashamed of your conduct. Religion and virtue have nothing to blush for in the praises bestowed upon your talents. . . . I have counted it a merit in Gresset', he concludes, with a canny eye on his audience, 'to have drawn upon himself the sarcasm of a number of literary men; for I have been so bold as to insist upon his virtue, upon his respect for morality, and upon his love of religion. This will doubtless expose me to the ridicule of the witty majority; but it will win me two votes which are more than a recompense—that of my conscience, and that of yours.'

Perhaps, after all, the judges cared more for Gresset's repute as a poet than as a man of virtue, and were not over-pleased with an apologia that balanced good morals against indifferent verse. Anyhow, for the fourth year in succession, no prize was awarded. The author took what comfort he

¹On the ground that 'his writings had always shown respect for religion and decency' (Proyart, *Louis XVI et ses vertus*, 2/339).

could from a copy of consolatory verses by his friend Dubois de Fosseux, and published his *Éloge* anonymously the same year.¹

VII

In 1788 there died in Paris the lawyer Dupaty, well known both as an advocate of judicial reform and as the author of books of travel and translations from the classics. His praises were promptly proposed by the Academy of his native town, La Rochelle, as the subject for a prize; and the following year there was published an *Éloge, par M.R. . . . avocat en parlement*, the style of which, as well as previous association, suggests that its author may have been Robespierre.² If this was so, one passage is worth quoting, as evidence of the direction in which Maximilien's views had developed during the crisis of 1788-9, and as a foretaste of his parliamentary style. 'You,' he writes, in a commentary on Dupaty's compassion for the poor, 'you, who ask so much in return for the charity that is extorted from you by the importunity of the needy; you, who are for ever complaining about the crowd of unfortunates that wearies your eyes; learn to blush for your insensibility! Do you know why there are so many poor? It is because you grasp all the wealth in your greedy hands. Why should this father, this mother, and these children remain exposed to all the hardships of the weather, without a roof to cover them? Why are they suffering the horrors of starvation? It is because you are living in luxurious mansions, where your gold pays for every art to minister to your comfort, or to occupy your idleness: it is because your luxuries devour in a day as much as would feed a thousand men.' There is more feeling than thought in this, and it is feeling of a kind that we have not hitherto suspected in Robespierre. Yet it is not unlike his famous outburst

¹The MS. is among the archives of the Academy at Arras. Hamel mentions a copy at the Louvre. For Dubois's verses, v. Lecesne, *Arras sous la Révolution*. The *Éloge* was published by Royez of Paris, and dated 1786. Robespierre sent a copy to Chapelle, one of his old masters at Louis-le-Grand (Ward, 33).

²It has been suggested that the author was Réaud.

against the rich clergy in the National Assembly the same year.¹

VIII

The society in which, after all, Robespierre seems to have been most at home, was not that of the solemn Academicians, but of the æsthetic Rose-lovers. The Rosati Club had been founded a few years before his return to Arras. Its members met every 21st of June in a garden at Blanzzy, by the bank of the river Scarpe and the abbey of Avesne. Sitting under a green bower of privet, ornamented with busts of Chapelle, Chaulieu, and La Fontaine, they ate and drank, and extemporized verses on the eternal themes of life and love.² Arras, though a small place, had some reputation for literature and art, and there was no lack of candidates for membership of so elegant a society. Of the original nine members, Legay, 'Sylva' Charamond (for they affected nicknames), Caigniez, Despretz, and Lenglet were lawyers; Carré was a *Chevalier de Saint-Louis*, Bergaigne a flower-painter, 'Berthe' Herbet the *vicaire* of Saint-Aubert, and Gignet a surgeon at the military hospital. Later members included Carnot (also an Academician) and Champmorin, officers of the Engineers, Dubois de Fosseux, Foacier de Ruzé, and Leducq (*père*), lawyers, Pierre Cot, a musician, and the Marquis de Vaugrenant, the commandant of the town garrison.

Robespierre's admission followed the usual rites. He was summoned to the bower, inhaled three times the scent of a rose, and pinned it to his coat; drank a ceremonial glass of wine and rose-water, was embraced by one of the members, and welcomed in speech and verse. Legay's address described him as 'a man who, since his first steps in the legal career, has fixed on himself the eyes of his compatriots. We admire high talents,' it continued, 'especially when, like yours, Sir, they are always devoted to a useful end; and we have followed with the highest interest the

¹v. 1/50.

²Dumarez, *Délassements d'un paresseux* (1790); Paris, 159.

stages of their development.' The speaker adds, with unconscious corroboration of Charlotte's account, that Robespierre has also social qualifications for admission to the club—'the gift of making witty remarks, and of turning a pretty verse; a taste for laughter . . . in a word, *desipere in loco*.¹ Charamond followed with an extempore song, which tells us nothing, except that Robespierre diluted his wine, and that the Rosati were not all poets. Herbet followed with a more ambitious composition, a metrical act of admission, which, for what it says of Robespierre, and of the Rosati, merits translation.

Whereas there lives a lawyer, a man of many parts;
Whereas the case is proven, he has a pretty wit,
In epigram and irony, and all without offence;
Whereas he likes (who doubts it) to sing, and laugh, and drink,
And sometimes, in his leisure, walks in the sacred vale,
Effortlessly ascending the peak of Helicon;
We therefore, the Rose-lovers, the only of our kind,
We devotees of pleasure, who laugh our worries down,
And, in our happy circle, and round our pleasant board,
Bring back the golden ages when poets joked in verse;
To all whom it concerneth—French, English, and the rest—
Born north or south th' Equator—Be it known that we this day,
In this our solemn council, and emptying each in turn
His cup, or glass, or beaker, hereby elect, *nem. con.*,
Maximilien de Robespierre into our brotherhood.
And when a certain month comes, a certain day and hour,
He must forsake his mansion, be present at our board,
And there to willing audience must sing a pretty song;
So now, as then, we'll cheer him:—Bravo! Hip, Hip, Hurrah!

Robespierre's reply to this demand was not a song—for he could not sing in tune²—but an oration, which became an unconscious skit upon his series of prize essays, entitled *Éloge de la Rose*.³ It shows Maximilien as the young æsthete; a rose-lover in a literary and semi-mystical way, not of the horticultural kind. His roses are those of 'the banquets of

¹Full text of the speech in Fleischmann, 46.

²v. the poem by Bergaigne in Paris, 187.

³The MS., in Robespierre's own hand, is full of erasures and corrections, and covers 14 pages.

Anacreon, the suppers of Horace, Augustus, and Maecenas.' He claims affinity also with the heroes and sages of Greece and Rome.

He goes on to describe a vision of Venus vouchsafed to himself and to his companions, whom the goddess designated as the corner-stones of a 'sublime edifice, founded on concord and amity', and taught 'the doctrines they were to believe, and the rites they were to perform'; and he explains how this higher love weaned its devotees from lower pursuits: 'we now felt nothing but distaste for all the passing pleasures of this perishable world, and the only bond that still attached us to life was the desire to fulfil our glorious vocation.'

It is possible that this 'precious nonsense' lay nearer to Robespierre's real mind than some of the vote-catching sentiments of his more serious *Éloges*. At any rate, we shall find affinities to it in his Puritanism, his *penchant* for a dogmatic society, his 'religion of virtue', and his Platonic courtship of the plain but earnest Eléonore Duplay.

There must, too, have been at least one occasion when Robespierre, dressed as a peasant, joined in the rustic dances of the village green. 'One cannot but acknowledge his fitness for membership of the Rosati,' wrote Dubois de Fosseux, 'when one sees him taking part in the pastoral revels of the village, and enlivening the dancers by his presence. See! the god of eloquence himself mixes familiarly with mortals, and reveals, beneath the shepherd's smock, the gleam of his divinity.'¹

IX

Poetry, rather than prose, however elegantly elaborated, was the proper medium for a rose-lover; and Robespierre soon showed himself not unskilled in light versification on amorous or satirical themes. These *Juvenilia*, none of which were published under his name, have been collected under three heads: *Poésies amoureuses*, *Poésies rosatiques*, and *Poésies diverses*. The first class includes a madrigal addressed

¹Paris, 187.

to *jeune et belle Ophélie*, whom French editors imagine to have been an English girl with the improbable name of Orptelia Mondlen¹; a *Chanson adressée à Mlle Henriette*, and *Autres chansons*, inspired by the same lady; *Vers pour le mariage de Mlle Demoncheaux*, who is addressed as *aimable Émilie, charmante amie*; a poem beginning *J'ai vu tantôt l'aimable Flore*; another addressed *A une beauté timide*, whose name is *Sylvie*; and perhaps a poem beginning *Je l'aimais tant quand elle était fidèle*, which was found among Robespierre's papers.²

It would be rash to look for autobiographical evidence in these ditties, which are such as most romantic young men write, at one time or another, and whose heroines are, as often as not, imaginary, were it not that Charlotte says her brother was particularly attractive to women, and that most of his letters belonging to the years 1782-8 are addressed to them.

Mlle Dehay was probably the *personne* to whom Robespierre entrusted his pet birds, when he went to College, and who afterwards presented him with a cageful of canaries. She may also have been the *jeune fille* to whom he wrote in June, '88; she was then living at Béthune, and bringing up a puppy for Charlotte—perhaps the famous dog 'Brount.'³ The lady to whom Robespierre sends a long account of his trip to Lens is doubtless Mme Buissart; she and her children shared her husband's life-long friendship for Robespierre.⁴ There was yet another lady—her name is unknown—to whom Robespierre sent a copy of a memoir which she had inspired.⁵ But the name which seems most likely to belong both to Robespierre's real life and to his world of make-belief is that of Anais Deshorties. She was a daughter of his aunt Marie Marguerite's husband by a previous marriage; and Charlotte says that Maximilien fell in love with her, spoke to her of marriage, and was 'painfully affected' when he returned to Arras in 1791, and found her married to a

¹The lines first appeared, anonymously, in two collections of verse published at Paris in 1787. They were reprinted and attributed to Robespierre in the royalist *Actes des Apôtres* (No. 5). He never denied authorship. The original MS., in his handwriting, was sold in 1845 for 500 fr. It was addressed to a lady at Arras (MS. note to Croker, 12)—perhaps Anais Deshorties (Fleischmann, 90).

²Stéfane-Pol, *De Robespierre à Fouché*, 54.

⁴Corresp. 24.

³Corresp. 23, 34.

⁵Corresp. 30.

son of his friend Leducq. The circumstances (if we can assume that Charlotte is wrong as to the date) fit those of the young lady to whom two letters are addressed—one (June 6, 1787) expressing undying interest in her, though she has treated him badly, and another, three weeks later, asking whether she is happy, and saying that he is not.¹ Perhaps, too, this incident is the origin of an early portrait of Robespierre which shows him with one hand holding a rose, and the other on his heart, with the motto, *Tout pour mon amie*.² If we knew more about this early disappointment, it might help to explain Robespierre's distrust of human nature, and especially of women.³

The *Poésies rosatiques* include *La Rose*, thanking the Club for his election; *Couplets chantés en donnant le baiser à M. Foacier de Rusé* (1787), *La coupe vide*, a drinking-song, in which the author makes a recantation of his temperance principles, and a poem of twelve stanzas, beginning, *O Dieux, que voi je, mes amis?* recited at the reception of Morin de Morcant.⁴ The poem beginning *Loin d'ici la cérémonie* may also have been written for a meeting of the Rosati.

The *Poésies diverses* contain one or two compositions more worthy of attention. *L'Homme champêtre*, published under a *nom de plume* in 1786,⁵ gives a conventionally rose-tinted picture of country life, and of the 'happy peasant':

He's no regrets that rend, and rend again,
No crime or fear to mar his blameless joy;
Pictures of happiness possess his mind;
He lives; his kin are happy; 'tis enough;
Nothing he needs is lacking; all his days
He tills the ground, and sings, and is alive.
Such is true bliss, and it is his for aye.

¹Corresp. 11, 12. cp. Fleischmann, 86.

²The portrait, in which Robespierre appears *très jeune, très mol, très fade* (Michelet, A.R. 1/387), is in the Saint-Albin Collection.

³The story of Robespierre's relations with Suzanne Forber, an Arras sempstress, invented by Montjoie, copied by Desessarts, and improved by Reybaud, deserves no credit. (Fleischmann, 81.)

⁴Texts in Fleischmann 50, 53, 329, Paris, 184.

⁵It was published in *Le Censeur universel Anglais* on August 12, 1786, over the name 'M. Drobeq', and dedicated, like the madrigal *jeune et belle Opbélié*, to 'Miss Orptelia Mondlen'.

THE LAWYER

There exist also a fragment of a satirical ode *Sur le mouchoir*, or *L'Art de cracher et de se moucher*;¹ *L'Éloge d'un magistrat humanitaire*;² and a poem sent with a present of game to *une jolie femme*, beginning (*a propos* of the dead hare) *Ce fameux destructeur des choux*.³

Mention must be made, too, of the mock-heroic ode in honour of jam tarts,

Thanks be to him who, with unerring hand,
Was first to fashion thus the docile dough,
And gave to mortals this delicious dish. . .

which Robespierre inserts in his long romantic description of an excursion to Lens, written in June, 1783.⁴

More worthy of memory, perhaps, was the poem of which his sister could recall, many years afterwards, only five lines; but those were prophetic of his fate:⁵

The just man's torment, at his final hour,
The only pang he feels—and I shall feel—
Is the dark breath of calumny and blame
Breathed by a grimmer ghost than death himself :—
The hate of those for whom he gives his life.

X

Such were the lighter interests of a young lawyer; what of his professional work?

¹Sainte-Beuve was told by an old bookseller at Boulogne, named Isnard, who had been a teacher of Rhetoric at the Collège d'Arras in Robespierre's time, that Robespierre wrote this poem during his briefless days, but left it unrevised; and that he (Isnard) was later dissuaded from publishing it by Charlotte, who feared that it might lose her brother the few clients he had. (*Journal des Goncourts*, in A.R. 10/263.)

²Noticed in Charavay's Catalogue December, 1927: 1 page 4°; thought to have been written for a Masonic function. Cp. the *cantique maçonnique* supposed to have been sung by Robespierre at a meeting of the *loge d'Hesdin* (Savine and Bournand, *le 9 Thermidor*). But there is no evidence that he was ever a mason. (v. A.H. 5/62.)

³v. Fleischmann, 92. This poem was communicated to *Le Chasseur illustré* in 1913. It is supposed to have been written in August, 1793; but the date throws doubt on its authenticity.

⁴The letter containing this poem was first published by Lewes in 1849. It reappears in *Corresp.* 5.

⁵They were inscribed on a medallion portrait of Robespierre, about 1835, and subsequently published by Laponneraye. (*Buffenoir* 69.) Charlotte said they were written at the time of the attempt on Robespierre's life in 1794 (v. 2/187).

On November 8, 1781, Robespierre had been presented by his friend Me. Liborel to the Conseil d'Artois, had taken the customary oath, and had been admitted to practise in the courts of its jurisdiction. Under the old judicial system, so soon to be swept away, Artois had still some 2,000 seigneurial jurisdictions, and Arras nine separate courts, in three of which—the Conseil itself, the Sheriff's Court (*Echevinage*), and the Bishop's Court (*Prévôté de l'Evêche*, or *Salle Episcopale*)—Robespierre's work would chiefly lie. The Conseil, proud of its sixteenth-century foundation, its privileged jurisdiction (*cas royaux et privilégiés*), and its crowd of eighty *avocats* and fifty *procureurs*, met every morning in the barrack-like halls of the Cour le Comte, the ancient residence of the Counts of Flanders, whose dark and dirty passages were the resort of lovers, duellists, and other disreputable characters. The Sheriff's Court, composed of the Mayor and ten sheriffs, had civil and criminal jurisdiction within the borough. The Bishop's Court, presided over by a *Bailli* and five *Juges-avocats*, exercised 'high, middle, and low justice' in Arras, Vitry, Maroeil, and parts of twenty-six parishes.

It was a field in which a young and ambitious man, with a fine college record behind him, and a family connection with the bar, might well hope to make a living and a reputation. Those who remembered the father applauded the son's attempt to restore the family fortunes, and readily gave him a start. Me. Liborel sponsored him before the Conseil, Me. de Madre made him his secretary, and the Bishop himself, within a surprisingly short time, gave him a vacant judgeship in the Episcopal Court.¹ And though he passed at first for a ready rather than an eloquent or invigorating speaker, and had had so little practical experience that he asked his friend Devienne to 'teach him the ropes', yet he secured from the first a practice of respectable size, standing (in 1782) seventh among the local lawyers, with fifteen briefs and twenty-three appearances in court.

¹The *brévet de la nomination* was given by Bégis in L'Annuaire de la Société des Amis des Livres, 1889 (Tournoux 3/25007).

His first brief, in the case of *Bardault v. Thellier and others* (January-February, 1782) came through Me. Liborel, and brought him into immediate notice. 'There is no news here,' writes Ansart from Arras to a Paris friend (February 22), 'except that a man called Robespierre, a recent arrival from your part of the world, has just made his first appearance here, in an important case, which he pleaded throughout three hearings so well as to discourage any one who intends to follow him in the same career. I didn't hear him myself, but they say he left men like Liborel, Desmazières, Brassart, Blanquart, and even the famous Dauchez far behind him in the way he opened his case, chose his words, and rounded off his speech. . . . One can see nobody among the younger generation capable of putting this brilliant light into the shade.'¹

It was probably this early success which brought Robespierre his most famous case—that of the lightning-conductor (*paratonnerre*)—in the following year. M. de Vissery de Bois-Valé, a retired lawyer who dabbled in Natural Science, had erected a lightning-conductor of his own design on the roof of his house at Saint-Omer. A neighbour, believing that the apparatus would endanger his life, went to the Sheriff's Court, and got an order for its removal. M. de Vissery appealed to the Council, and engaged his friend Buissart to mobilize scientific opinion in his defence. On the advice of Condorcet, at that time Secretary to the Académie des Sciences, an elaborate memoir was drawn up, and the soundness of de Vissery's case confirmed by the best legal opinion of Paris as well as of Artois. When the case came before the Council, Robespierre, as 'one of the most eloquent members of the Arras bar',² was chosen to conduct the appeal. Cleverly widening the issue, he reminded the court of the persecution of Galileo, Harvey, and Descartes; gave a detailed history of lightning-conductors, from Dali-

¹Vellay, however, would redate the letter, arguing that it refers to the *paratonnerre* case.

²De Vissery to Franklin, December 10, 1782.

bard's experiment in 1752 to the latest discoveries of Benjamin Franklin; and added impressive evidence of the successful use of the apparatus in France and abroad. The judges were urged to show themselves champions of Enlightenment. They did so, and the case was won.

Robespierre got his pleadings printed, and sold them in Paris. A complimentary copy was sent to Franklin, with a covering letter, in which the author asserted that 'the happiness of being useful to his country, in persuading its judicial authorities to welcome Franklin's important discovery, was only less than the happiness of being able to count on the favour of one whose least merit was to be the most distinguished scientist in the world'.¹ His gratification must have been complete when he read in the Paris press that 'M. de Robespierre, a young lawyer of exceptional merit, has displayed in this affair an eloquence and a sagacity which give the highest possible impression of his talents'.² But a cynic might have noted that, whilst de Vissery was footing the bill for the publication of the victorious speeches, he had to face another prosecution, and finally died, worn out by the unsuccessful championship of scientific progress.

Nor did this almost Parisian fame bring Robespierre many fresh briefs from the clerical and conservative litigants of Arras. Indeed, in *Deteuf v. Charlon* (November, 1783), he went out of his way to offend churchmen by a violent attack on the morals of a certain Dom. Brognard; a mistake for which he hardly made amends by defending his old friends the Oratorians in *Berbizotte v. Gillet* (August, 1784). Two years later all his sympathy with the movement for women's rights was enlisted on behalf of an Englishwoman, Mary Sommerville, widow of Colonel George Mercer, Governor of South Carolina, who had been imprisoned for debt.

One other case may be mentioned, to show in what direction public affairs and Robespierre's ambitions were moving. Forty years before, a French soldier named Dupont

¹Corresp. 6. The title of the work was *Plaidoyers pour le Sieur de Vissery de Bois-Valé*, etc.

²*Mercur de France*, June 21, 1783. Cp. Croker, 308.

had deserted, and served for more than twenty years in the armies of Sweden and Denmark. Then, hearing that a rich uncle had died, he returned home, and claimed a share of the estate. His elder brother, instead of welcoming the prodigal, threw him into prison, under a *lettre de cachet*, as a deserter. When at last he got out, and made his claim, the brother was dead, and his cousins, who had inherited the property, appealed against the court's decision in his favour. The case dragged on for years, and Robespierre had to give it up; but not before he had used the unpopular *lettres de cachet* as the text of an eloquent exposition of the ideas of 1789. 'That Infinite Being,' he declares, 'who created man for sublime ends, and who has endowed him with the appropriate faculties, fashioned him for society, as the state best fitted to develop those precious gifts, which it is at once his duty to perfect, and his privilege to enjoy. It follows that all forms of society and government, however they are named, are good only in so far as they lead to this end, and, whenever they obstruct it, are essentially vicious and useless. Such is the real basis of that social contract of which so much is said. It does not come from a free and voluntary agreement on men's part; its foundation-deeds are written in heaven, and were drawn up, from all eternity, by that Supreme Legislator, who is the source of all order, all happiness, and all justice.' There follows a disquisition on freedom; and the speech ends with an appeal to Louis XVI to come forward as the champion of the rights of the People. 'To lead men through virtue to happiness . . . ; to forge the deathless chain which should unite us to God and to our fellow-men, by destroying all causes of oppression and tyranny, . . . such, Sire, is the glorious enterprise to which you have been called.'

XII

It is at first sight surprising that, after such successes as he had in the Bardault and de Vissery cases, Robespierre should never have built up more than a moderate practice. For the facts are clear. In his first year (1782), he had fifteen

briefs, and made twenty-three appearances in court. In 1787, his best year, he had twenty-four briefs, and made twenty-five appearances before the Council, in addition to four before the Sheriff's Court. His average, for the nine years 1782-9, was no more than fifteen briefs and twenty-four appearances a year. How was this? His own explanation, in the bitter *Lettre adressée par un avocat, etc.* (1788), was that the older members of the Arras bar monopolized local practice, and made it almost impossible for young lawyers to get a living; and this common complaint may well have been true. Charlotte Robespierre, to whom the facts were doubtless brought home in practical form by the shortage of house-keeping money, has several things to add. First, her brother would never take up a bad case, and was therefore always on the winning side. If this was really so, it might ultimately have made him a wealthy man; but meanwhile such caution must have lost him many clients. Secondly, he always tried reconciliation before litigation, and spared his client's pocket at the expense of his own. There is an instance of this in his letter to the Abbé Touques¹; but does not every lawyer sometimes advise a settlement out of court? Lastly, we are told that Robespierre preferred poor to rich clients, and often helped them out of his own purse, instead of charging them a fee. There is some suggestion of this, again, in the sympathetic letter to a female client, whom he advises to elevate her mind above such trifles as the delays of the Law, and 'to find in her own heart consolation for the wickedness of vile and cruel men': yet, though these were the words of a confessor, perhaps, rather than of a lawyer, they were not such as to hurt his practice.² Charlotte, indeed, may have every right to insist that her brother entered the legal profession with the high ideal of 'defending the oppressed against their oppressors, and pleading the cause of the weak against the strong'; there were high-minded young men in eighteenth-century France who went to the bar for philanthropic reasons, just as there were in nineteenth-century England who took Orders as

¹Corresp. 10.²Corresp. 8.

an opportunity for social reform. And, so far as Robespierre allowed such motives to decide the choice of a client, or the conduct of a case, he would be likely to damage his professional prospects.

But these are, after all, tactical errors. May there not have been deeper reasons for Robespierre's failure? Was he definitely distrusted, or disliked?

Le Blond says that he offended his colleagues by talking about his academic successes, a weakness which one of them exposed in the epigram:

A University prizeman
Is not a universally prized man.¹

Nor is it to be supposed that Robespierre easily lived down the reputation for liberal and heterodox opinions which he had earned whilst still at college. Indeed, there was quite enough in his public behaviour and utterances to alienate the older and more conventional members of the bar. His conduct of the Deteuf case (November, 1783) seriously offended the judges, and drew upon him a rebuke from his old patron, Me. Liborel. In the Duhamel case (January, 1784), heard before the Sheriff's Court, he is said to have conducted the affair so badly that his friends the brothers Carnot, who were in court, supporting his client, interrupted his speech, and expressed surprise at his great reputation.² In the Page case, also before the Échevinage (January, 1787), the court condemned his pleadings, which had shown no mercy to the delays and injustice of the judicial system, as containing 'expressions derogatory to the authority of the Law, and of Jurisprudence, and insulting to the Bench'. The Duport case (April, 1788) caused further offence. The politician appeared too clearly beneath the lawyer's gown; and it was no accident when, the same year, Robespierre was not invited, with other Arras lawyers, to take part in a conference on legal reform. He was not in the mood to let such an offence pass, but issued an open letter

¹*L'on peut avoir des prix dans l'Université
Sans être, pour cela, dans l'Univers cité.* (Le Blond, 58.)

²Memoirs of Carnot 1/96. Vellay's reasons for rejecting the story seem inadequate.

attacking his colleagues, and earned a second rebuke from Me. Liborel.¹

Another incident, in no way discreditable to himself, showed his discontent with the system that he was supposed to be administering. He did his work as *juge-avocat* of the Bishop's Court, his sister says, 'with exemplary equity', until, one day, he was faced with the duty of passing the death sentence upon a murderer. Thereupon he came home in great distress, took no food for two days, and ultimately resigned his post, rather than do such a thing again. Here is an instance in which we are able to check Charlotte's memory; for Guffroy, who was one of Robespierre's colleagues on the bench, has also left an account of the incident. 'The elder Robespierre,' he writes, 'will remember my firmness, when we were judges together in the Salle Episcopale at Arras, and condemned a murderer to death. He can hardly have forgotten our philosophical and philanthropic discussions; nor that it cost him much more than it did me to make up his mind to sign the death-sentence'. That is to say, Robespierre did sign the death-warrant, however unwillingly (a point which Charlotte obscures), and did not resign his judgeship. There is further evidence of this; for we have his signature as judge to a document of August 26, 1788; on June 21 of the same year he joined in the refusal of the Bishop's court to register the Lamoignon decrees; and his name still appears in the Artois *Almanach* for 1790.

In any case, the incident is misunderstood if it is taken as illustrating an academic objection to capital punishment which Robespierre conveniently forgot in the days of the Terror; for the death penalty in 1794 was a gentlemanly and painless decapitation; ten years earlier it would have meant at least a clumsy and degrading hanging, and possibly the long-drawn torture of breaking on the wheel.

Here, at any rate, is a series of incidents suggesting that

¹Robespierre's letter appeared as *Lettre adressée par un avocat au Conseil d'Artois à son ami, avocat au parlement de Douai*; and Liborel's reply as *L. . . avocat en Parlement et au Conseil d'Artois, à l'auteur d'une libelle anonyme*, etc. Cp. Vellay in R.H.R.F. 4/508.

Robespierre grew increasingly out of sympathy with his profession, and out of favour with his colleagues; it is therefore not surprising either that he failed to make more than a bare living at the bar, or that, when the opportunity came, he turned his considerable talents, and his great ambition, from law to politics, and from a provincial court to a national assembly.

For this, too, his kind of eloquence was better suited. Contemporary critics distinguished between two types of legal oratory—that of the *avocats*, who sacrificed nicety of language to the necessity of winning their case, and that of the *gens de lettres*, who cared more for rational principles than for the letter of the law, and aimed at a literary perfection of style.¹ Robespierre definitely belonged to the latter school. He always tried to go behind the text of his brief to the general principles at stake. The Page case becomes a discussion of the rights and wrongs of usury. The defence of Mary Sommerville involves the whole question of women's rights. Dupont's grievances are taken up into the national demand for a regenerated government. Everything is judged by its relation to eternal laws of absolute justice. Further, this philosophical outlook must be expressed in the language of a student and of a scholar. For Robespierre could never forget that he was a picked pupil of the best teachers of rhetoric in the country, at a time when oratory was an art valued equally in the pulpit and at the bar, and when the power of making a persuasive speech was the most valuable asset that an ambitious young man could possess. Accordingly he studies his style with as much care as he dresses his hair; writes and rewrites his speeches; looks up appropriate quotations from Bacon and Montesquieu, Leibnitz and Condillac; and (no doubt) practises declamation in his study, or on his country walks; until he is master of a style which has, among the rhetoricians of the time, few rivals, and of a delivery which, though unattractive, triumphs over his physical disabilities, and can never be ignored.

¹Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, 1/196.

Historians have long been aware how deep were the sources, and how complex the character of the revolutionary movement of 1789. As an intellectual and economic change it reached far back into the eighteenth century; as a reaction against a system of society it has been traced through Louis XV to Louis XIV and Richelieu; as an assertion of personal and political liberty it may even owe its origin to John Huss and the Lutheran Reformation. Nor was it the work of any one class, or the effect of any one cause. The miseries of the workers—the vast majority of the population—both in town and country gave it body and permanence. The grievances and ambitions of the *bourgeoisie*—the thrifty, intelligent, and active minority, excluded alike from government and privilege—provided it with apostles, and with a creed. But it was the privileged orders themselves—the feudal nobility, the chartered lawyers, and the dignitaries of the church—who, by their opposition to the crown, and by their dallying with reform, started a revolution of which they were to be the first victims.

To Robespierre as a provincial barrister the crisis began with the Lamoignon edicts of 1788, by which the government attempted to break down the resistance of the Parlements to its budgetary expedients. The Bishop's Court, of which he was a member, joined in the general protest against this attack upon the vested interests of the bar. Differing from most of his colleagues in his desire for judicial reform, he resented, as hotly as they did, a complete recasting of the judicial system, which would deprive the Parlements not only of some of their most profitable business, but also of the right, which they had come to regard as constitutional, of registering the royal edicts. Thus his first appearance on the revolutionary stage was as a representative of privilege, and a champion of reaction.

But the immediate effect of this resistance was to evoke and organize other and more dangerous forms of opposition to the government. The nobility, the clergy, the middle-class intelligentsia, the representatives of trade and finance,

the members of the newly-constituted provincial assemblies—all joined in a resistance which became less and less passive; till, in August, 1788, the government was forced to agree that the summoning of the States-Général, which every class regarded as the remedy for its own particular ills, should be put forward to May, 1789. At once the separate Orders, temporarily united against the government, fell apart again. When the provincial Estates of Artois met in December, 1788, the Commons presented a manifesto demanding, among other things, double representation for the Third Estate; and there followed a series of memorials and counter-memorials which would have warned wiser rulers of the difficulties before them. But this was not all. If the States-General of 1789 were to escape from the feudal precedents of 1614, if the national assembly at Versailles was to be something better than a congeries of the royalist and reactionary bodies which had hitherto misrepresented the views of the provinces, then the whole system of election must be reformed.

Such was the gist of the pamphlet which Robespierre now addressed to the people of Artois—his first essay in political controversy. His argument is that all the ills from which the Artois people suffer are due to the provincial Estates, and that the remedy lies in the popular election of their representatives. He writes as a politician, not as a social philosopher, concentrating upon local grievances, as the most effective way to win a hearing for national issues, and upon a political remedy, as the clue to others no less important. Thus, too, he illustrates his argument with examples that will appeal to an Artois audience—a recent meeting of citizens held in the Abbey at Arras; the story of a clerk who was dismissed for taking a bribe, and afterwards reinstated; the *corvée* to which a number of *fermiers* were subjected, during a shortage of fuel, in the Hainault district; and other local scandals of which he has been informed by sympathizers with his cause.¹

¹*A la nation Artésienne, sur la nécessité de reformer les États d'Artois.* Robespierre was not alone in these opinions: they recur in a series of *brochures* in the British Museum (R. 232).

This pamphlet might be read merely as one of the many thousands of manifestos which, on the rather ill-advised invitation of the government, were at this time flooding the provincial as well as the Parisian press. But to those who knew Robespierre and his political ambitions, it was something more—an Election Address to the Commons of Artois. This was, indeed, made clear enough in a second edition, which soon followed, and by the active part which the writer (prompted by his friend Guffroy, who was already in Paris)¹ proceeded to play in the events of the spring of 1789.

For the Revolution was now in full swing. In January appeared the royal letter convening the States-General. On March 23 Robespierre attended a preliminary meeting of all members of the Third Estate at Arras who had not met separately as members of their *corporations*, and was one of twelve elected to draw up a memorial (*cabier*) embodying their grievances and demands. About the same time he was employed by the corporation of cobblers (*cordonniers mineurs*, or *savetiers*) to draft the special *cabier* in which they complained of a too inquisitive municipality, the competition of the *compagnon* cobblers, and the commercial treaty with England, which had sent up the price of leather.² Soon afterwards Robespierre was elected one of the twenty-four representatives of the Third Estate of Arras to meet the representatives of the 245 constituencies comprised in the whole *gouvernement* or *bailliage*; and at this meeting he was one of the forty-nine nominated to draw up the final *cabier* of the *bailliage*.³

Meanwhile he had published another pamphlet, perhaps two. The *Avis aux habitants des campagnes*, issued in March, is such a cautious document, confining itself to agreed reforms, that it cannot confidently be claimed as his work.⁴

¹Ward, 67.

²Paris gives a facsimile of this document.

³Hamel claims that it is all his work. But in fact it contains a number of demands—free annual voting of taxes, equal admission to all public offices, freedom of the press and of worship, and so on, only some of which were peculiarly his own.

⁴Guffroy, in his *Le Frank en vedette*, claimed the authorship, and Vellay is inclined to admit it (R.H.R.F. 4/508).

But no one else can well have written *Les ennemis de la patrie démasqués*—an attack upon the municipal authorities of Arras for their reactionary conduct during the elections.¹

On April 20 the final stage of the elections was at last reached. The representatives of all three Orders met in the great nave of the abbey to hear mass, to take an oath, and to listen to patriotic speeches by Bishop Conzié and the Duc de Guines. That done, they met again separately, to verify their mandates, to draw up their *cabiers*, and to elect their deputies. When the Commons met, it was proposed by the Duc de Guines, as chairman, that they should send complimentary addresses to the other two Orders. Thereupon 'a lawyer got up, and said that there was no need to thank people who had done nothing but renounce abuses'; and the proposal had to be dropped. This uncompromising democrat was Robespierre:² he had already decided to stand for the people.

Four days later the Commons proceeded to the election of their deputies. Eight had to be chosen; and, as each of them was required to get a certain proportion of votes in a separate scrutiny, it is not surprising that the election lasted five days. Those ultimately successful, in the order of their election, were—Payen, Brassart, Fleury, Vaillant, Robespierre, Petit, Boucher, and Dubuisson. Four of them were *fermiers*, representing the country voters, two lawyers, and one a gentleman (*chevalier*). Four more, all lawyers, were elected as *suppléants* to fill any future vacancies.

XIV

Robespierre's enemies asserted that his election was due to intrigue. An election pamphlet by Guffroy represents him as saying, 'I have discussed the grievances of the Commons against the nobility with such angelic sweetness that I have been given the appropriate name of "the angry lamb (*l'agneau enragé*)."'³ Another local wit, describing the

¹v. Ward, 68.

²He boasted of it afterwards at the Jacobin Club (April 28, 1792).

³*La sentinelle artésienne* (A.R. 2/243).

chosen deputies in the language of the racing stable, reserved the same word for Robespierre—*L'Enragé*.¹ Le Blond recounts how Robespierre got his relatives to canvass for him in the country villages of the district, bargained for the support of Beaumetz, and made speeches in which he played upon all the grievances of the constituency.² He had, at any rate, for a lawyer, shown an unprofessional activity in politics, and had made no secret of his ambition to become a deputy. Though still looking for legal appointments,³ he had few hopes of permanent success at Arras, and the Revolution seemed to him, as it did to so many of his contemporaries, a heaven-sent invitation to Paris and fame.

On May 1 the Artois deputies appeared before the representatives of the three Orders in the hall of the General Hospital at Arras, and took an oath to carry out their duties. They set out by the next available coach for the capital.⁴ Robespierre, it is recorded, was so badly off that he had to borrow from a friend of his sister, Mme Marchand, the price of his fare, and a trunk in which to pack his clothes.⁵ The particulars of his meagre wardrobe were remembered, when he became famous, by the maid who packed his belongings; and he was said to have promised the humble l'Anquillette who carried his bag to the coach, that the day would come when his family would be mayors of Arras.⁶

So Robespierre set out on his political career.

¹Fourdrin de Frévent: he describes this horse as *vieux comme une mule . . . et n'ose mordre que par derrière, crainte du fouet* (Lenôtre, 29).

²Le Blond, 69.

³A letter to Buissart, dated May 13, shows that he was then standing for the position of *procureur du Roi près la juridiction prévôtale* (i.e., the *Maréchaussée*) *de la ville d'Arras*. (A.H. 7/76.)

⁴There was a local connexion every Friday with the coach from Amiens to Paris (Lenôtre, 31).

⁵Fouché also claimed to have lent him money at this time; but he was not at Arras (Hamel, 3/571).

⁶Le Blond, 81, 77. Proyart changes the name to Lantillette. Lecesne accepts this, but says his real name was Antoine Delmotte. He was made a member of the Arras *Comité de surveillance* by Le Bon in An.II, but never became mayor. (*Arras sous la Révolution*, 2/413).

CHAPTER III

THE DEPUTY (MAY–DECEMBER, 1789)

I

VERSAILLES was crowded; and Robespierre and his fellow-deputies had some difficulty in finding rooms at the sign of the Fox (*Hôtellerie du Renard*), rue Sainte Elisabeth.¹ As they did not leave Arras before May 1, they can hardly have been at Versailles in time for the royal reception of the deputies on May 2. But they certainly took part in the procession of the Orders on the fourth, and in the opening session of the fifth; sharing, no doubt, to the full the mixed impressions of those days—the excitement and bewilderment of provincials in contact with the splendours of the Court, the high hopes of patriots in the first national assembly for 170 years, and the disillusionment of citizen-deputies who found themselves treated as inferiors, and their demands for constitutional reform silently set aside.

On May 6 the deputies of the Third Estate met, by royal command, in the *Salle des Menus Plaisirs*; and they met alone, for the other Orders had their separate accommodation elsewhere. How should they proceed? The States of 1614, their only precedent, had consisted of two privileged Orders, and one unprivileged, and the Commons had knelt when they addressed the King. The provincial assemblies of the last few years had also been tainted by their division into Orders. The example of the English Parliament—foreign, feudal, and bi-cameral—was unacceptable. ‘Imagine,’ wrote Mirabeau, ‘more than 500 individuals, herded into one room, not knowing one another, collected from all parts of the country, without leaders, without officials, all free, all equal, none of whom had any right to give

¹v. Brette, *Recueil* 2/138; Hamel 1/80: now rue Duplessis, No. 31 (Lenôtre, 33). Michon (36) wrongly identifies it with rue de l’Étang, No. 16, on the ground that Augustin Robespierre writes from this address (Corresp. 19).

orders, and none any obligation to obey them; whilst everyone, in true French fashion, was more anxious to talk than to listen to others talking!¹ It was not until the evening of May 8 that 'certain provisional rules of procedure' enabled the assembly to get on with its work, and to decide—to do nothing.

II

The size and arrangements of the Salle des Menus Plaisirs made it most unsuitable for its purpose. The deputies sat on backless forms, covered in green cloth, and the President with the secretaries at a big central table, from which he could not address one part of the company without turning his back on the rest. The seats originally provided for the other Orders were partly filled by *suppléants*, friends or relations of deputies, and the general public, who overflowed from the amphitheatre onto the floor of the House. This confusion was, indeed, defended as contributing to the national character of the occasion. 'The ideal plan,' said Roland, 'would be for the Assembly to deliberate in the presence of the whole people; a building of vast and majestic proportions, big enough to hold 12,000 spectators', would (he thought) be a security against corruption and intrigue.² But such disorder was neither comfortable nor businesslike; and in July, on the proposal of the ingenious Dr. Guillotin, the seating was rearranged in semi-circular form, with the President at the end of the hall.

In any case the place was too big; 'None but stentorian lungs,' writes Arthur Young, 'or the finest clearest voices can be heard';³ whilst the failure to adopt proper rules of procedure, or to prohibit the intervention of the public, made calm and orderly debating almost impossible.

III

At first no places were set apart for the Press, and reporters might have to stand at the door all night, if they

¹*Lettres à mes Commettans*, No. 2.

²*Travels in France and Italy* (ed. Maxwell), 142.

³*Arch. Parl.* 64/431.

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wanted a front seat in the morning. Nor were they provided with any official material, but had to rely on their notes and their memories. The President was supposed to announce the name and constituency of each speaker: but this could not always be done; or the customary uproar might make both President and speaker inaudible.

All this has to be taken into account when reading the reports of Robespierre's earlier speeches. For instance, his attack on the clergy, on June 6, was variously reported, and attributed to different speakers; so was his speech on Lally-Tollendal's motion of July 20.¹ Even when he was identified as the speaker, his name was spelt in a bewildering variety of ways—Robespierre, Robes-pierre, Robesse-pierre, Robests-piesse, Robespienne, and so on; a common variation, Robert Pierre, with or without a hyphen, led at least once to the statement that MM. Robert, Pierre, and Buzot had taken part in a debate.² There is no reason to suppose that his name was purposely omitted, or distorted: other speakers suffered in the same way.

It was in order to remedy such mistakes as these that it was proposed to set up a committee of the House to edit minutes of the debates; but the motion was thrown out.³ The deputies were suspicious of anything that might encourage jobbery, or partisanship. Instead, the custom grew up of allowing speakers to submit the MSS. of set speeches, or reports of those delivered extempore, and even of printing them, as a mark of appreciation, at the expense of the House.⁴

IV

For some three weeks after its first session the assembly of the Third Estate followed a policy of masterful inactivity.

¹v. Rouanet in A.R. 8/336, 1/163, cp. the reporting of Barère's speeches in *Point du jour* (R.F. 44/497).

²*Correspondance de Bretagne*, July 20, 1789.

³Laborde de Mereville's proposal, May 20, 1789.

⁴Mirabeau sometimes reported his own extempore speeches by writing them down after delivery. (R.F. 45/481).

The situation is nowhere better described than in Robespierre's letter to Buissart of May 24. The Commons, he says, refuse to adopt the name, or even to recognize the existence, of a Third Estate. They regard themselves as a part, and the most important part, of a 'National Assembly'.¹ They wish to give the clergy and nobles—the missing members of the 'national body'—every opportunity to join them. If they will not, the Commons are prepared to declare themselves alone the National Assembly, and to act as such. He explains why, in his maiden speech of May 16, he opposed both Rabaut's motion for the appointment of commissioners to confer with the clergy, and Le Chapelier's suggestion of a solemn appeal to both Orders. He was afraid that the ecclesiastics would take advantage of a conference to weaken the resolution of the Commons, and he thought it was useless to appeal to a body so fixed in its pretensions as the *noblesse*. He therefore proposed a third plan—a friendly invitation to the clergy alone to join the Commons; if it were accepted, a united appeal could then be issued to the nobles, such as they could hardly refuse without alienating the opinion of the whole nation. This suggestion, though supported by Mirabeau on the 16th, was unfortunately ruled out of order. If it had been made earlier in the debate, Robespierre was assured by many of the deputies, it might well have been adopted; for it was a clever move to divide the forces of the Opposition. Robespierre was disappointed; but he consoled himself with the thought that the Assembly included 'more than a hundred citizens prepared to die for the country', and that the deputies were on the whole intelligent and well-intentioned. The Artois delegation, he tells Buissart, have already won a reputation for patriotism, and are working in close alliance with the deputies from Brittany. He has his own opinion of Target (a disappointing speaker), Malouet (a dangerous intriguer), and Mirabeau, whom he at first regards with suspicion. He exposes the plan of the nobles—to surrender certain pecuniary privi-

¹Notice the use of this title three weeks before its formal adoption. It occurs, indeed, in a speech by Lafayette to the Notables in 1777 (his *Memoirs* 1/164), and in the *cabiers* (Deslandres, 140).

leges as a sop to the Commons; as well as that of the bishops—to accuse them of anti-clericalism.¹

It is remarkable that a provincial lawyer should have been able, so soon, to form so shrewd an opinion of policies and personalities; still more, that he should have proved himself a parliamentary tactician of no small ability, and an orator whose maiden speech caught the attention of the House and of the Press. This same letter was circulated, nearly fifty years later, among members of the Constituent Assembly under Louis Philippe. The King asked to see it, and, after reading it, remarked (remembering well the circumstances of 1789), '*C'est parfaitement exact*'.²

The Artois deputies, of whom Robespierre was now the recognized spokesman,³ continued, in alliance with the Breton members, their opposition to the policy of conferences. On May 29 they were overruled; but by June 10 their judgment was vindicated, the patience of the House was exhausted, and an ultimatum proposed by Sieyès led to the declaration, a week later, of the National Assembly.

V

It was, no doubt, partly exasperation with these delays which prompted Robespierre's outburst on June 6, when the Archbishop of Nîmes appeared before the Commons, calling attention to the miseries of the people, and suggesting a conference of all three Orders to deliberate on a remedy. The Commons might be excused for thinking this *démarche* no more than an attempt to cheat them out of their independence. Robespierre, by no means an anti-clerical, was so moved by the sight of a rich ecclesiastic exploiting the needs of the poor that he broke into an extempore harangue that thrilled his hearers. 'The clergy,' he cried, 'should be reminded of the principles of the Early Church. The old Canons provide for the selling of altar vessels to relieve the poor. But there is no need for such desperate

¹Corresp. 16.

²Hamel, 182.

³Robespierre s'était chargé de parler pour tous les autres (*Almanach des députés*, 1790).

remedies. All that is necessary is that the bishops and dignitaries of the church should renounce that luxury which is an offence to Christian humility; that they should give up their coaches, and give up their horses; if need be, that they should sell a quarter of the property of the church, and give to the poor.'

How great was the effect of these words we know from one who heard them—Étienne Dumont, the friend and biographer of Mirabeau. 'At this speech,' he says, 'which was so well suited to the passions of the moment, there arose, not a torrent of applause, . . . but a confused murmur, which was more flattering. Everybody asked, who was the orator? He was not known, and it was only after some minutes of investigation that a name was repeated from mouth to mouth which, three years later, was destined to make France tremble. It was that of Robespierre. Reybaz, who was sitting next me, said, "This young man is not yet experienced, he is too verbose, and does not know when to stop; but he has a fund of eloquence and originality which will not be lost in the crowd."¹ The proposed conference never took place; and not long afterwards we find the Archbishop of Paris, in an elegantly-printed Pastoral Letter, exhorting his 'very dear brethren' to subscribe to a fund for the relief of the poor opened by the *receveur du clergé du diocèse*.²

The only other speech of this period which may with some confidence be claimed for Robespierre is one on a motion for an address to the King (June 12), protesting against any kind of flattery in the language used by a democratic assembly to one who is more than suspected of hostility to its claims.³

VI

It is often said that Robespierre made no mark as a speaker in the early days of the National Assembly. The

¹*Souvenirs sur Mirabeau* (E.T. *The Great Frenchman*, etc.) 34; "— too verbose": the reports of the speech are mere summaries.

²Brit. Mus. F. 61*.

³The *Moniteur* gives the speaker's name as N.

evidence does not bear this out. Certainly there was nothing impressive about 'that anxious, slight, ineffectual-looking man in spectacles, his eyes (were the glasses off) troubled, careful; with upturned face, snuffing dimly the uncertain future times'.¹ 'He told me,' writes Dumont, 'that he was as shy as a child, that he always shook with fear on approaching the tribune, and that he was hardly conscious of his surroundings when he began to speak'.² Yet it cannot be doubted, from the reception of his speeches on May 16 and June 6, that he made a name, among the 600 of his Order, from the very start of his political career; and his friends at Arras were already receiving letters from Paris full of his praises.³ From the first it would be clear that his opinions were of an uncompromising kind. He had secured an introduction to Necker;⁴ and Mme de Staël describes how she met him at her father's house, about this time, 'when he was known only as a lawyer from Arras, and an extreme democrat. His appearance,' she says, 'was common (*ignoble*), his complexion pale, his veins of a greenish (*verte*) colour'.⁵ He supported the most absurd theories with a coolness that had the air of conviction; and I felt pretty sure that, in the early days of the Revolution, he had honestly adopted ideas of economic and social equality picked up in the course of his reading—ideas which his jealous and evil disposition made it a pleasure for him to adopt'.⁶

VII

The events of June and July, 1789, which form a transition from the first to the second group of Robespierre's speeches, and a turning-point in his experience, may be described in his own words.⁷

'The present Revolution,' he writes, 'has produced in a few days greater events than the whole previous history of

¹ Carlyle.

² *The Great Frenchman*, 146.

³ v. Ward, 77, 98.

⁴ Le Blond, 69, 75, 82: no other biography seems to preserve this fact.

⁵ Is this the origin of Carlyle's 'sea-green'?

⁶ *Considérations*, 2/130.

⁷ Corresp. 17.

mankind.' The counter-revolutionary alliance of court and *noblesse*, backed by foreign troops, has been defeated by the firm attitude of the Commons, led by Mirabeau. The people of Paris—'a patriotic army of 300,000 men, composed of every class of citizen, accompanied by *gardes françoises*, *Suisses*, and other soldiers', has captured the Bastille, and 'punished' its governor, and the Prévôt des Marchands, for their treachery. The fear that this army might march on Versailles has 'decided the Revolution'.

Robespierre does not say what part he played in the Tennis Court oath of June 20; but his signature appears high up (forty-fifth) on the famous list, and his figure is prominent in David's symbolical picture of the scene; he is represented pressing both hands upon his breast, as though—it was the artist's own explanation—'he had two hearts for liberty'.¹ Again, it is not from himself that we learn that Robespierre was one of the deputies chosen to accompany the King to Paris on July 17; but his account of the scene shows that it made a deep impression on his mind.² 'The deputies,' he writes, 'were arranged in two lines, between which the King set out in an unpretentious carriage, escorted only by a detachment of the Paris *milice bourgeoise*. The procession began at the door of the Assembly, and made its way to the Town Hall. It would be impossible to imagine a spectacle more august, or more sublime; still more, to describe the sensations it produced in minds capable of feeling. Picture to yourself (he writes to Buissart) a king whose name only yesterday the whole capital and nation held in awe, passing along, with the representatives of the people, in front of a citizen army three ranks deep, and two leagues long. He could see his own soldiers standing among them; his ears were struck for the first time with a universal shout of *Vive la nation! Vive la liberté!* As if these great experiences were not enough to occupy one's mind, the mere mass of unarmed citizens, mobilized from every part of Paris, and covering the houses, the places of vantage, and even the trees by the road-side; the women adorning the

¹Blanc, 2/254; Lewes, 81.

²Corresp. 17.

windows of proud and lofty mansions, who welcomed us as we passed, and whose applause and patriotic delight added as much charm as brilliance to this national festival; these, and a crowd of other circumstances no less interesting, sufficed to engrave the image of this great event for ever on the imagination and the heart of all who witnessed it. I saw monks (he continues) wearing the cockade that has been adopted by all the inhabitants of the capital. I saw at the church-doors that we passed on our route stoled and surpliced clergy, surrounded by the crowd, vying with them in the eagerness with which they testified their gratitude to the defenders of the country.' Robespierre ends by describing the King's reception at the Town Hall, and the visit of the deputies to the Bastille, accompanied by armed citizens, and surrounded by a cheering crowd. 'I could scarcely tear myself away from this spot, the sight of which brings such feelings of pleasure and such notions of liberty to all good citizens.' A post-script adds, 'M. Foullon was hung yesterday, by decree of the people'.

Robespierre, then, shared to the full the patriotic fervour of those July days. There is evidence, too, in the post-script, and in the reference to the 'punishment' of De Launay and Flesselles, how easily, even in a lawyer's balanced mind, fervour might become fanaticism, and private crime pass for public virtue. Robespierre had, indeed, experienced, during that passage through the cheering crowds, a revelation of Rousseauism manifest in the flesh. He had heard for the first time, like Louis, the voice of the people, and thought that it was the voice of God. From this moment dates his mission. He will be an apostle of liberty, a preacher of the rights of men, a deputy for the people.

VIII

Still in his high mood of July 17, his ears still tingling with the cheers of a free people, Robespierre returns to parliamentary routine. There is a new urgency in his words, a new singleness of purpose. He sees everywhere forms of

imprisoned liberty. Every debate calls him to quixotic rescues of oppressed innocence.

Lally-Tollendal—one of those who could see nothing in the popular rising but a threat to middle-class security—proposed a proclamation calling the nation to order, and confining the recruitment of the newly-formed *gardes bourgeoises* to middle-class citizens (July 20). Robespierre secured its postponement, as an insult to the people. Yet, three days later, after Foullon's murder, he supported Barnave's suggestion of a special court to deal with cases of *lèse-nation*. He could do this without compromising his principles either as a lawyer or as a Rousseauist. The Sovereign People, like the monarch it displaces, can do no wrong. Its accountability, by a convenient fiction, is transferred to its agents—a King, a council of Ministers, or a tribunal. Its moral responsibility is discounted by the rule that what is wrong at ordinary times may be right in a revolution. Nevertheless, a dangerous door was already being opened to the punitive court of August, 1792, and the Revolutionary Tribunal of March, 1793.

If the people's right to lynch whom it would was thus admitted in theory, and limited in fact, so was its freedom to say what it thought. It was debated, should the Assembly open suspicious letters confiscated in the post? (July 24.)¹ Robespierre's view was that on principle one should not violate the privacy of the post, but that when national liberty is in danger, the case is altered; 'what at other times is a crime, then becomes an action worthy of praise'. Did he think, how long will liberty last, at this rate?

It is the same on July 31 and September 5. Besenval is accused of *lèse-nation*. He has a right to liberty in the abstract. But 'the People must be assured that its enemies do not escape the vengeance of the laws': so let him be tried. The Marquis de la Salle has been arrested on a charge of removing gunpowder from the Arsenal. Robespierre protests against his unquestioned release, and says that it would be

¹The letters were from Castelnau, French ambassador at Geneva; and one was addressed to the Comte d'Artois.

regarded by the public as a glaring example of class favouritism.¹ On the other hand, there is as yet no law against emigration: the Duc de la Vauguyon cannot be refused the right of passage to England (August 6). Nor need proceedings be taken against local magistrates, or private citizens, who, in an excess of democratic zeal, have seized liberty, rather than wait for it to come to them (August 21). Arbitrary action is only objectionable when used against the freedom of the individual.²

The next issue was liberty of conscience. Its clerical critics hoped, by debating this question on a Sunday (August 23), when they counted on the lay deputies taking a holiday from Versailles, to secure the rejection of the obnoxious Article 18 of the Declaration of Rights. But Mirabeau and Robespierre faced the storm, and after a long and tumultuous debate arrived at the compromise:—'No one may be interfered with on account of his opinions, even on religious subjects, provided that he does not express them in such a way as to disturb public order as by law established'. Robespierre, indeed, would have gone further towards perfect freedom; and the clergy, already antagonized by his speech of June 6, could never forgive this apostasy of a protégé of Saint-Vaast and a model scholar of Louis-le-Grand. Their resentment expressed itself on August 28, and was not much appeased by Robespierre's generous attitude towards clerical salaries and pensions.³

After liberty of conscience, liberty of opinion. In the debate on Article 19 of the Declaration of Rights (August 24), Robespierre, following Barère, objected to any attempt to limit the freedom of the Press. 'There must be no compromise,' he is reported as saying: 'the liberty of the Press must be laid down quite frankly. Free men cannot claim their rights in ambiguous terms. . . . Freedom of the Press is a corollary of freedom of speech'. The only safeguard

¹Marat wrote next day: 'The acquittal of M. de la Salle has been received with pleasure by every class of citizen except the lower orders (*le petit peuple*), who view it with extreme suspicion.' (Rouanet in A.R. 11/62.)

²A magistrate at Ville-franche had failed to convoke the *corps électoral nobiliaire*; and four citizens of Marienbourg had appointed new municipal officers.

³Rouanet in A.R. 10/309: cp. 1/86.

required, on the side of the State, was a legal remedy for any abuse of this liberty.¹

So too with the Article on the *force publique*, which Robespierre helped to formulate, and which defined the army and police as serving the public, and guaranteeing the rights of men and citizens.

Finally, on August 26, came the question of taxation; and here, more than ever, Robespierre was forced to limit the rights of the individual by the rights of the state. Should not the liberty to think what one likes, and to say what one believes, carry with it the liberty to pay what taxes one wishes? No, says the apostle of freedom; for the free citizen is a member of the free state, and what is a free act of the whole body may become a compulsory act of its separate parts. 'As soon as the power to legislate is transferred to the hands of the nation, the right to impose taxes is there too; and unless the nation could force every citizen to pay them, this right would cease to exist.'

If Robespierre still had time, as in his Arras days, to 'sit in the corner, thinking', he must have been surprised to find himself moving so quickly along the path from philosophy to politics—from the abstractions of Rousseauism to the realities of revolution. It was his legal training—his quickness in finding a formula to reconcile opposites—which saved him at this time from intellectual anarchy, just as it was his clerical upbringing—his Oratorian regularity—which saved him from amoralism.

IX

Every Frenchman with any pretence to culture, said Mallet du Pan, thought that he could draw up a constitution. 'Making a Constitution is a new term they have adopted,' reports Arthur Young, 'and which they use as if a constitution was a pudding to be made by a receipt'.² Hardly had Mounier finished reading the first few articles

¹Similar sentiments appear in M. J. Chénier's *Dénonciation des Inquisiteurs de la pensée*, published the following day (Lav. 1/131). For the progress of liberty of the Press during and after 1789, v. Tourneux in R.F. 25/193.

²Saint-Beuve, *Causeries du Lundi*, 4/509; *Travels in France and Italy* (ed. Maxwell), 148.

proposed by the Constitutional Committee (August 28), when a dozen deputies were on their feet with formulas and counter-formulas for defining the character of the state. Robespierre, forced by the experiences of the last month to see that there could be no liberty without order, urged the House to adopt such rules of procedure as should secure a free hearing for all, and an uninterrupted debate. He was shouted down by the clericals, and his proposals, although backed by Mirabeau, met with no success. The House was impatient of any attempt to drill its deliberations, specially upon English lines. The National Assembly was to be a political Quakers' meeting. The representatives of the people would speak when and as they were inspired. One could not rule the voice of God out of order.¹

It was not till September 7 that Robespierre was able to get a hearing on the crucial issue of the royal veto—the first that brought out clearly the party divisions in the Assembly. The mass of opinion, as his brother wrote to Buissart, clearly echoing his views (September 5), was in favour of a veto of some kind. 'The simplest minds are fully aware that an absolute veto would paralyse the legislature: what they cannot see is that a suspensive veto would have the same effect, and would, indeed, be even more dangerous. . . . The great majority (he goes on) is for a suspensive veto: only a very small minority opposes a veto of any kind'. But this includes the Breton deputies, who 'have just received instructions not to vote for any veto; and our Artois members will follow this brave lead'.²

The reasons for this extreme attitude are given in the speech of September 7. The sole origin of law, Robespierre maintains, is the General Will (*volonté générale*), working, for convenience, through a National Assembly. To allow any

¹Rouanet in A.R. 10/308. A study of the rules of procedure in the House of Commons, made by Sir Samuel Romilly, had been translated by Dumont, and presented by Mirabeau to the National Assembly. 'We are not English, and we do not wish to be English, was the answer given to him. Not the smallest attention was paid to his writing' (Dumont, 96.) Robespierre himself did not hesitate to support an interruption of the business of the day if he felt that freedom of speech was at stake (*Moniteur*, October 20, 1789).

²Corresp. 18.

individual to veto the decision of such an assembly is to put the particular will above the general—‘a monstrous situation, both morally and politically inconceivable’. There is, no doubt, the possibility of an abuse of power; but that is much more to be feared from a hereditary king than from an elective assembly. As to the suspensive veto, it may work in England, where ‘the civil laws seem to remedy the inconveniences of the political laws’, and where there is no great military force in the hands of the king; but France must settle her own problems in her own way; and to keep even a suspensive veto would be to leave ‘an open door for despotism and aristocracy’.¹

Experience did much to justify Robespierre’s view. The suspensive veto, as Augustin pointed out, might have worked under a bi-cameral legislature: under single-chamber government it was sure to be swept aside by the first really democratic assembly. It soon became a trap in which to catch the king.² Louis, who would hardly have dared to use an absolute veto, found a suspensive one well suited to his weak and dilatory ways; whilst the Assembly, always in a hurry, found delay hardly less exasperating than denial. The sequel to the rejection of Robespierre’s views in September, 1789, was the tragedy of August, 1792.

If the King, in Robespierre’s mind, should have no veto on the Assembly, neither should the People. In the course of his speech on September 7 Robespierre had expressed opposition to the idea of a plebiscite (*appel au peuple*). ‘The people,’ as he said a few days later (September 12), ‘can exercise its power only through its chosen representatives; and it is right that the people should change them frequently; for nothing is more natural than the desire to exercise its rights, to make known its opinions, and to state its wishes at frequent intervals’. But this does not mean a referendum: it means a revolution.³

¹Rouanet in A.R. 11/65. The speech was published as *Dire De M. Robespierre . . . contre le veto royal*, etc. Robespierre intervened twice more in the debate, which lasted till September 11.

²Corresp. 19.

³At the time of the King’s trial, three years later, the referendum came up as a political move, and Robespierre rejected it for political reasons (v. 1/304).

The veto was not only to be suspensive: it was also to be declared inoperative in respect of the foundation deeds of the Revolution. Robespierre had not intervened on the famous night of August 4:¹ but his approval of what had been done then was shown by the support he gave to Mirabeau and Barnave a month later (September 14), against the royalist contention that the decrees embodying the 'abolition of feudalism' were subject, like any others, to the royal veto. His view was that these decrees were part and parcel of the Revolution, logically, if not chronologically, prior to any question of veto, and that they required no authorization on the King's part, but merely his 'sanction', or official publication.

Louis' attempt, four days later, to discriminate between the decrees roused a storm in the Assembly; and Robespierre expressed the feeling of the majority when he said, 'In constitution-making the nation only needs one will, and that is its own'. But more delays followed; and on October 5, just two months after the 'abolition of feudalism', an exasperated House heard the King's final attempt to evade the issue cheered by members of the clergy and of the *noblesse*. This was too much. Robespierre, in a speech which can only be reconstructed from fragments recorded in various journals, denounced the King's letter as an attempt to impugn the sovereignty of the people, and proposed that the Assembly should demand his instant signature to the decrees. The cheers which greeted these bold words were remarked by a royal agent present at the debate.² Robespierre was supported by Duport, Grégoire, and Mirabeau. His motion was carried. A deputation waited upon the King. The decrees were signed.³

France, for this victory, used new weapons, and Robespierre had new allies. It was on this evening of October 5

¹But it may have been he who protested (August 3) against the description of the feudal dues as *droits légitimes* (Hamel, 1/130); and he may have joined in surrendering the rights of Artois (Ward, 80).

²*Bulletin du sieur de Riolles, etc.* (Tuetey 1/969); was this the first time Louis had heard of Robespierre since the speech of welcome at Louis-le-Grand fourteen years before?

³Ronanet in A.R. 11/196.

that the Assembly was invaded by a deputation from the crowd of women who had marched from Paris to Versailles to ask for bread, and for the decrees on feudalism; and it was Robespierre who dealt with their leader Maillard, and calmed their excitement. Nothing could be more significant of his growing influence.¹

Three points had still to be cleared up, before the king's subordination to the constitution was secure. The first was the Civil List. Should it be made a permanent charge on the Treasury, or should it be met by an annual grant? (October 7.) Mirabeau supported the former plan; Robespierre, suspicious, as always, of the Executive, and jealous for popular control of finance, the latter; and he won his way.

The second point was the form in which the Assembly's decrees should be published. Robespierre (October 8) declared that the old monarchical formulas were no longer suitable, and that the House ought to devise an appropriate alternative. Royal proclamations were still being issued in which the King laid more stress upon *notre sagesse* than upon the deliberations of the Assembly, and required the Parliament to register his edicts, as though this defunct body retained its old right of remonstrance. Phrases such as *de notre pleine puissance*, or *car tel est notre plaisir*, had an odd sound in the mouth of a constitutional monarch. But what was to be done? Nothing could be more absurd than to attempt to draft new formulas in an assembly of the whole House; and it is not surprising that Robespierre's attempt to do so was ill received, and led to a temporary set-back in his parliamentary career. The *Moniteur*, in the only hostile account of a speech of his which it allowed itself during this year, reported the scene thus. 'M. Robespierre proposes an amendment, and makes a long speech upon it, in the midst of an uproar excited by divergence of opinions. He bores the House by drafting a ridiculous (*tres-plaisante*) formula, which he always tries to read out when members are

¹v. Maillard's evidence before the Châtelet (*Moniteur*, 1/App.). Robespierre's intervention is not otherwise mentioned.

talking, and fails to read out when they are listening; (this formula is) "Louis, by the Grace of God, and by the Will of the Nation, King of the French: to all citizens of the French Empire: People, here is the law which your representatives have made, and to which I have affixed the royal seal"". This exordium was recited in such a sing-song voice that a deputy with a Gascon accent rose, and remarked jokingly, 'Gentlemen, this formula is no use; we want no psalm-singing here'; and in the resulting merriment, Robespierre sat down. One would not stress this incident, had not Robespierre's biographers underestimated it. He was accustomed to being interrupted, but not to being laughed at. Deficient in sense of humour, and surer of his opinions than of himself, he shrank from ridicule; and this experience left its mark upon him.¹

A third point remained. Arbitrary imprisonment had been abolished, but the royal prisons were still full of the victims of *lettres de cachet*. Some members thought that those illegally imprisoned should be released, others that the House should call for a return of their names, and of the charges under which they were detained. Robespierre, remembering the Dupont case,² was for complete and unconditional release. His policy towards the throne in all its manifestations—veto, proclamations, *lettres de cachet*—was the same—the Voltairian *Ecrasez l'Infame*. But one must not be in a hurry to infer that he had ceased to be a monarchist. Voltaire died a nominal Catholic; and Robespierre was still far from being a republican.³

X

The close of the session at Versailles (October 15) found Robespierre regarded, in spite of the setback of October 8, as one of the most prominent speakers in the Assembly,

¹Rouanet in A.R., 11/208 Montlosier (*Mémoires*, ed. Lescure, 193) recounts a rather similar incident.

²v. 1/35.

³For the sequel, v. 1/80.

and as an uncompromising champion of liberty and democracy. When the House met again in the Archbishop's Palace, in Paris, a few days later (October 19), he set himself to consolidate this reputation.

The Salle de l'Archévêché 'combined almost all the inconveniences possible for its purpose',¹ and commissioners were soon appointed to find a better place of meeting. But it was not until the collapse of a public gallery, during debate, had injured four deputies, and a number of the general public, that the Assembly moved to the famous Manège.

This was a long, narrow building, standing between the walls of the Feuillants convent and the Tuileries garden. Originally built as a riding-school for Louis XV, its proportions were not much improved by shortening in 1792, and it was always excessively inconvenient for the purposes of public assembly. The President could hardly have been worse placed for keeping order, nor the speakers for being heard; for the hall was divided into two parts by raised *tribunes* in the centre of each side, so that those sitting on the right could only half see or hear those sitting on the left. The low ceiling echoed every sound; yet a speaker had to shout to make himself heard. The mephitic atmosphere, to which Vergniaud attributed the irritability of the deputies; the prevalent disorder both on the floor of the House and in the public galleries; and the general discomfort and over-crowding of the place—all played their part in disorganizing the proceedings.²

Whereas at Versailles there had been accommodation for some 3,000 spectators, the Manège had only two free galleries, seating some 100 each, at either end of the hall, and a third on the side opposite the President's seat, to which entry was allowed by written order. The result was constant overcrowding, and an undesirable traffic in tickets. Matters were not improved by the 'packing' of the public

¹*Courrier de Provence*, 55/1.

²Brette, *Recueil*, and in R.F. 23/64 (with plan); Lintilhac in R.F. 70/289; Vergniaud's account of the difficulties of a President, *ibid.*, 70/292.

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seats. In the course of 1790 the custom of placing certain persons in the galleries, whose business it was to keep order, developed into a regular system of 'clagues', organized in the interest of this or that political party. By the spring of 1791 as many as 200 *claqueurs* were receiving thirty *livres* a fortnight from certain *chefs de brigade*, who arranged for their attendance in the public seats, and told them whom to hiss, and whom to applaud. They would sometimes throw missiles at unpopular speakers, or assault them when they left the House.¹

The method of voting was at first by rising in one's place; later, by show of hands. But on important occasions, or when the majority hoped to intimidate the minority by the fear of publicity, there would be a demand for the *appel nominal*, under which each member had to express his vote by word of mouth, giving his reasons for it, if he wished, in a short speech.

The amount of intervention allowed to the public would seem intolerable in any modern legislature, and was, indeed, a serious interference with the free expression of opinion; but there was no other way in which to secure publicity of debate, or a general knowledge of parliamentary proceedings, at a time when no full or trustworthy accounts of debates were printed, and when, even in the case of an *appel nominal*, it could not otherwise be known on what side a deputy had voted.

It should be added that, in the National Assembly, as in other parliaments, an immense amount of useful work was done behind the scenes, both on committee, and in informal meetings, only some of whose results appeared in the public debates or decrees of the House.

XI

From October, 1789, until July, 1791, Robespierre lodged with a man named Imbault, or Humbert, a Jacobin,

¹*Ordre de l'arrivée et de l'entrée à l'assemblée nationale*, in Brette, *Recueil*, 1/162; Mathiez in A.R. 2/568.

at No. 30, rue Saintonge, in the Marais quarter.¹ This part of Paris seemed to a provincial the pleasantest in which to live, 'combining, with the wealth of the capital, the friendliness of a country house, and the amenities of a rustic retreat'.² The road ran out north-eastwards from the centre of the city towards the old walls, now the Boulevards; and it was a walk of nearly a mile to the Town Hall, a mile and a quarter to the Archbishop's Palace (at the south-east corner of the Ile de la Cité), and little under two miles to the Manège, or the Jacobin Club. Robespierre's 'secretary' for seven months during 1790 was a penurious ex-captain of dragoons, named Pierre Villiers, who afterwards wrote down some memories of their association. Robespierre, he says, was very badly off at this time. True, a decree of August 12 gave him a deputy's salary of eighteen *livres* a day, with arrears as from April 27—a sum of more than 2,200 *livres*; but only part of his income was available for household expenses, since some went to his sister at Arras, and some to a mistress—'a woman of about twenty-six, who idolized him, but whom he treated rather badly', often refusing her the door. Consequently he lived so frugally, and had so few clothes, except a well-brushed olive-coloured coat, that when the Assembly, in June, 1790, went into three days' mourning for Benjamin Franklin, he had to borrow a black suit from a man four inches taller than himself. Nevertheless he constantly refused offers of help, and gifts of money. His chief friend at this time was Desmoulins, and there was talk of his marrying Adèle, the sister of Camille's wife, Lucile Duplessis.³ Mirabeau he

¹In his first letter from Paris, in November, 1789 (Corresp. 21), and when signing Desmoulins' marriage register in September, 1790, he gives his address as No. 30; in his advertisement of May, 1791, and his evidence before the tribunal in August, 1791, he gives it as No. 8: so does the *Liste des députés* for 1791. Villiers gives it as No. 9. Michon claims to have identified the present No. 64 with No. 38 in 1836 and No. 30 in 1790; and adds that confusion may have arisen from the fact that when streets ran through more than one section the houses might bear two numbers. That the house had a garden of some size is clear from Robespierre's speech of April 11, 1792 (v. 1/221).

²*Un provincial à Paris*, 31. Long ago, it had provided a home for Ninon de l'Enclos.

³Fleischmann, 104.

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admired, and would have made a bid for his friendship, had he kept less company with men of the Court.¹

XII

The transference of the Court and the Assembly from Versailles to Paris was to have critical results both for France and for the Revolution. For France it meant the reversal of the long tradition by which, during times of political danger, Paris had been a source of disruptive movements, and national unity had sprung from the provinces. For the Revolution it meant that the rather academic programme of the political reformers could—indeed must—now be based on the practical needs of a great city. What made both these changes practicable and effective was the process which had been going on all through the eighteenth century, by which the Paris *bourgeoisie*, gradually acquiring wealth, education, and political power, had ousted the church from its monopoly of means and privilege; and by which the capital, always more of a consuming than of a producing community, had, nevertheless, through its luxury trades, and its working-class population, drawn into closer contact with the industrial centres of the provinces, and more out of touch with Versailles.

It needed no economist to be aware of this change, no sociologist to foresee its effects upon the Revolution. It must have been forced upon Robespierre's attention every time he walked to and from his lodgings in the Marais; the immense variety of life that crowded the poorer streets, from basement to attic; the business of feeding this multitude—always a preoccupation of the government—which seemed to be turning Paris into a huge provision store; the new streets and houses springing up in the suburbs—a fruit of middle-class enterprise; the great hospitals, institu-

¹For Villiers' *Souvenirs d'un déporté*, v. 1/xxvi. Lewes' variations on the theme (84), and Fréron's accusations of meanness (Pap. inéd. 1/154) seem to rest on no evidence. There was included in the sale of Sardou's collection in 1909 a pencil and pastel drawing of a woman by Claude Hoin, inscribed *La dévouée Hortense Delannoye, maîtresse du traître Robespierre*. (A.R. 2/391.)

tions, and municipal departments, passing from clerical to lay control; and the varied and vivid ways in which the districts of the city were organizing their separate affairs, and co-operating in the government of the whole community.¹ True, it might have been better if these bodies had paid more attention to the immediate necessities of a crowded population. The incredibly filthy state of the streets, especially in hot weather, the piles of refuse or manure at the doors, or the slops emptied from the windows, went ignored, in the refusal to work, the disregard for discipline, and the waste of time in political gossip, which were by now becoming endemic.² 'All Paris,' wrote an English visitor, 'is still in a ferment. The last sound which dies away upon the sleeping ear is the rattle of the patriot drums, and the first murmur which disturbs our rest is the martial music of the national militia. . . . It is like living in a citadel besieged. In every street you are surrounded by hawkers of pamphlets with terrific titles, and every hour is startled with some new tale of terror.'³

Nor would Robespierre need Mercier's Juvenalian *Tableau de Paris* to warn him of the existence, particularly in the eastern and southern parts of Paris, of a huge working-class population, quite outnumbering the well-to-do, and not only destitute, diseased and ignorant, but also morally debased by a system of government whose neglect encouraged every kind of crime, and whose fear imposed ferocious and brutalizing punishments.⁴

XIII

The second day of session at Paris (October 21) saw the first shots fired in a struggle which was to alter the whole course of the Revolution—that between the middle-class and the proletariat. There was something more than the

¹Cp. Jaurès 1/130-157.

²Tourneux 1/20.

³William Taylor, May 14, 1790.

⁴Braesch, arguing from the proportion of *ouvriers* to *patrons* in 1791, concludes that the working class numbered 293,820 out of a total population of 500-550,000 (R.F. 63/289).

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usual shortage of bread, and a baker was murdered. The conventional remedy was called for—a court to punish disorder. Robespierre believed, as his brother wrote to Buissart,¹ that the shortage was the work of profiteers, who bought up bread wholesale, in order to retail it at a gain; and he maintained that the situation was being exploited by enemies of the Revolution, who hoped, by driving the Assembly into the use of force, to create bad blood between the government and the people. Martial Law, he rightly foresaw, meant class warfare. Indeed, within two years municipal troops were shooting down their fellow-citizens on the Champ de Mars, and, within four, Bailly, the author of the ‘massacre’, was to hear, as he mounted the scaffold, the words, ‘Remember the Martial Law’.

Middle-class reaction soon took another form. What qualifications ought to be required in an elector, or in a candidate for election, for a municipal or departmental body? The Assembly was agreed on three points—French nationality, twenty-five years’ age, and a month’s domicile (October 22). The Constitutional Committee proposed a fourth, which could hardly be reconciled with any reading of the Declaration of Rights, and which roused violent opposition—a property qualification, which they defined as the payment of direct taxes equivalent to three days’ wages, for electors, and ten days’, for candidates.² The excuse given for thus limiting the franchise and representation was the fear of corruption; its real origin was the belief, which was pretty generally shared by political thinkers and practitioners of the time, however democratic their professions of faith, that the common people were not fit for political responsibility, and that the management of the state ought to be in the hands of men of property and education. But to Robespierre, supported by Duport and Grégoire, any property franchise appeared to be a middle-class bid for power, particularly odious on the part of legislators who

¹Corresp. 18.

²When difficulties arose as to the value of a day’s work, it was laid down that it should be fixed by local usage, between a minimum of 20 *sous* and a maximum of 50 *centimes* (Lav. 1/165).

had themselves been elected on an almost universal suffrage, and who had solemnly declared, only two months before, that the Law was the expression of the General Will, and that 'every citizen has the right to assist personally, or through his representatives, in drawing it up'.¹ 'Every citizen,' he therefore declared, 'has an equal claim to representation, whoever he may be. Sovereignty resides in the people—that is, it is distributed among all the individuals composing the people'; and it follows that every citizen has a right to vote—to exercise his part of the sovereignty. The case for manhood suffrage could not be more cogently put;² and if the speaker had only added the one word *citoyennes* to his *citoyens*, he would have been not only three years in advance of the Revolution, which did not abolish the property qualification (and then only on paper) till 1793, but also much more than half a century ahead of France, in which manhood suffrage was first achieved by the revolution of 1848, and in which women are still without the vote.

A week after this fateful division, the bourgeois majority in the Assembly took another step to secure their power. It was proposed (October 29) that no one should be eligible as a deputy in the new legislature unless he paid taxes to the value of at least one *marc d'argent* (about fifty-four *francs*, equivalent to some fifty days' work)—a qualification which would exclude one Frenchman in three, and rule out a number of the present members.³ The only amendment moved was one to make an exception in favour of the sons of those thus qualified; and this amendment Robespierre twice opposed (October 29, November 3), feeling, apparently, that, if the obnoxious measure were to stand, it had better be as obnoxious as possible. He carried his point,

¹Declaration of Rights, Article VI.

²Jaurès (2/8, 16), in his eagerness to show that the Constituents never faced the question of universal franchise, represents Robespierre as arguing 'coldly and half-heartedly': but there is no sign of this. It is more noteworthy that he should not yet attack the prejudice which still denied the vote to domestic servants, bankrupts, actors, Protestants, and Jews. (Lav. 1/164.) Cp. 1/70.

³Severe as this sounds, it was liberal compared to the views of the party of the Right, who proposed a *revenu foncier* of 1,200 *livres*, hoping to make the Assembly representative of the landed aristocracy, on the English and American model (Lav. 1/164).

but the *marc d'argent* remained, as a permanent offence to democracy.

The result of these franchise decrees was to set up a fatal distinction between what came to be called the 'active' and the 'passive' citizens—a distinction as stupid as that suggested by our phrase 'the working classes', and much more dangerous. It was reckoned (in May, 1791) that out of the total population of the country—about twenty-four millions—only 4,298,360 were 'active,' and had a vote, whilst about 2,000,000 adults were excluded from the franchise.¹ Loustalot prophesied that within ten years the *marc d'argent* would either restore despotism, or bring about a communistic revolution. He was not far wrong. In 1795, Babeuf, the prophet of communism, was indeed crushed, but by 1799 France was under the heel of Napoleon.

The immediate effect of these measures was a feeling of soreness in many parts of the country—a feeling which Robespierre, bitterly resenting the way in which the cause of the people had been betrayed, took every opportunity to exploit.² A 'seditious resolution' of the Metz Parlement (November 17) led to a debate, in which he attacked the conservative Vicomte de Mirabeau, whose *pasquinades revoltantes*, he considered, compromised the dignity of the House.³ On November 18–19 he moved to increase the size of the new legislature, and of the departmental assemblies, in order to make them more democratic. He intervened in a similar sense in the matter of the Cambrai Estates (November 19) and the disorders at Toulon (December 14).⁴

He only spoke twice more before the end of the year. On December 23 he carried his principles of October 22 to their logical conclusion, and demanded the franchise for Jews, actors, and Protestants. The conservative and catho-

¹Lav. 1/165.

²cp. Corresp. 21.

³Augustin to Buissart, September 5. The Vicomte retaliated on December 15, by giving the lie to Robespierre in the House, and securing the adjournment of the debate.

⁴The Cambrai Estates had passed a 'seditious decree'. On the approach of an Anglo-Dutch fleet the citizens of Toulon had armed themselves, and imprisoned some officers of the garrison.

lic orator, Maury, had declared that the profession of an actor was as infamous as that of an executioner, and that a Jew was as much a foreigner as an Englishman or a Dutchman. Robespierre's reply was an eloquent protest against anti-Semitism; whilst as to actors, he maintained that 'their virtues would reform the stage, and that the theatres would become schools of high principles, good behaviour, and patriotism'. He already foresaw the part that the stage was to play in the propagation of Jacobinism.¹

XIV

So ended France's first year of liberty, and first six months of parliamentary government. Great things had been done: the arbitrary power of the Crown restrained, the worst of feudalism abolished, the nation armed, the sovereignty of the people established beyond recall. If there was cause for apprehension, it lay less in the resentment of the defeated aristocracy than in the oligarchical tendencies of the victorious middle-class. These tendencies were natural enough. It was popular action which had determined the issue at every crisis of the Revolution—on July 14, August 4, October 5. But the populace was ignorant, unorganized, incoherent, and unfit to rule. It would have been an act of faith beyond any reasonable expectation, if the lawyers and business men of the Assembly had shared their political rights with the labourers of the countryside and the slum-dwellers of the towns. Robespierre might have realized this. But he was not trying to be reasonable. He was fired with Rousseauism, with the memory of July 17, and with the Declaration of Rights. He had so fallen in love with liberty and equality that he wanted to see them everywhere. If he had been a member of an official Opposition, liable to be asked to govern the country better than the men he was criticizing, he would have been forced to modify his programme. Once or twice he was troubled, for a moment, by that choice between the practicable and the desirable which

¹cp. A.H. 8/261.

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torments all statesmen. But for the present, and in the main, he could be an untrammelled champion of the great democratic abstractions. In a series of nearly fifty speeches he had forced himself on the attention of the House and of the country. He might be provocative, he might be bitter; others besides Chateaubriand might find him boring.¹ But to the foodless, workless, and voteless class, to the people who suspected that the Revolution had only loosened one form of oppression to bind them under another, Robespierre already stood out as a possible leader against the new aristocracy—the aristocracy of wealth.

Travellers crossing the Swiss frontier to the little village of Genod, in the Jura, noticed by the roadside a stone obelisk, on which the inhabitants, welcoming them to a land of freedom, had recorded, in this first year of the Revolution, the names of those who deserved ‘the love and gratitude of Frenchmen’. They were Mirabeau, Syeyes (*sic*), Chapelier, Barnave, Grégoire, Robespierre, Talleyrand, and Bailly. On the back of the stone were inscribed, as ‘the shame of mankind’, Maury, Mirabeau *cadet*, d’Épréménil, Malouet, and that unpopular law-court, Le Châtelet de Paris.

XV

It has been questioned whether Robespierre, during 1789, was content with the limited publicity given to his views in the Assembly, or whether he may not also have written for the Press. On November 2 there appeared the first number of a paper called *L’Union, ou Journal de la Liberté*, published by the head of an English firm, T. Marshall and Co., oddly described as ‘importers of foreign cloths and investigators of genealogies’, for the benefit of English residents in Paris. Originally bi-lingual, it appeared, from November 13 onwards, only in French, and continued to come out in that form until April, 1790. On the authority of a statement in the royalist *Actes des Apôtres*,² and of a letter addressed to Robespierre by a man who may have been the London

¹Lewes, 134.

²v Fleischmann, 91.

correspondent of *L'Union*, Hamel believed that Robespierre was the editor of this paper. But, if this had been so, would the journal have printed his name as Roberspierre, Robert-Pierre, Robers-Pierre, and Robertspierre? Would its parliamentary reports have omitted all mention of his speeches of November 18, November 21, December 8, December 9, and twice as many more between January and April, 1790? Would it have given only ten lines to his important speech of January 25, and a short and mutilated version of that of February 22? It sometimes printed extracts, provided by the speakers themselves, from Mirabeau, Duport, the Lameths, and Rabaut Saint-Étienne: would it have done less for Robespierre? In any case what qualifications had he for editing a half-English paper?¹

XVI

Robespierre, indeed, was so fully occupied with his attendance at the Assembly, and with the preparation and publication of his speeches—always, for him, a long and laborious affair—that he had little time to give even to his family and friends, or to the affairs of his native town. Only one of his letters belongs to the five months between July 23 and the end of the year. It is addressed to his friend Buissart, and begins with an apology for not having written before. Evidently he has fallen out of touch with his constituency. 'What are they thinking and saying,' he asks, 'in Artois? What are they doing?' How is Buissart himself occupied? 'Who are now at the head of affairs?' Are the new laws being published and enforced? But he is not really interested in provincial politics. He has caught the Parisian pose, and can hardly take his mind off the work of the Assembly. Three-quarters of the letter are devoted to his own views on recent legislation—the nationalization of church property,

¹v. Hamel 1/218; Tourneux; Rouanet in A.R. 9/145. *L'Union* reappeared as *Journal de la Liberté* between May and August, 1790; and as *Le Surveillant* in February, 1791. The supposed London Correspondent was P. de Cugnères (Corresp. 48): the date of his letter (September 16, 1790) is subsequent to the (first) disappearance of *L'Union*.

the franchise, the new Departments. He offers no immediate prospect of a return home.¹

It was the same with his family as with his friends. Charlotte admits that she never saw him during the two years of the Constituent Assembly, though she claims that they corresponded frequently, and that she knew all he did. Augustin, who had followed his brother to Versailles early in September, and was sending Buissart the news,² was on bad terms with his relations at Arras, and quarrelled with Maximilien himself. At Arras he might have done something to support his sister: at Versailles he was a charge on his brother's purse. When Maximilien moved to Paris, in the middle of October, he returned to Arras.³ Six months later he and his sister both write, saying that there are no prospects for him there, that they are very badly off, and that they would like to come to Paris. This crisis was⁴ tidied over, perhaps by a gift of money; for we hear no more about the proposal till June, when Augustin hints that he would like to come up with the *fédérés* of the Pas-de-Calais for the Fête of Federation on July 14. Whether he did so is not known; but some time in the summer Maximilien relented; for when next we hear of Augustin, on September 9, he is writing at his brother's desk in Paris.⁵ It may be guessed that one so wedded to his career as Robespierre did not easily reconcile himself to the company of a ne'er-do-well brother, and a jealous and sentimental sister.

¹Corresp. 21. He had not spoken in the debate on the Departments (September 29); but his letter shows that he regards this as another anti-democratic measure.

²Corresp. 18 and 19: both translated in Lewes, 115.

³Corresp. 20; undated, but apparently the fourth week in October.

⁴Corresp. 29 (April 9), 32 (undated, but apparently about the same time).

⁵Corresp. 47; received, September 9.

CHAPTER IV

THE CHAMPION OF LIBERTY (1790)

I

THERE is no clear cut between the parliamentary history of 1789 and of 1790; nor any convenient halting-place short of February, 1791. It will be best, therefore, in considering Robespierre's speeches, which compose almost the whole of his life during this period, to begin by tracing the themes already announced, and partly worked out, in the first eight months of the Assembly, and to follow up their development, if need be, a little beyond the end of the year. The first of these was the question of parliamentary procedure.

Robespierre's attempt to enforce upon the House rules of debate (August 28, 1789) might recoil upon himself. On April 20, given the right to make a second speech in a debate on the game laws (*droit de chasse*), he uses it, not to propose an amendment, but to discuss the original motion, and has to be called to order. On June 17 he tries to speak after the vote has been called for, and has to stand down. A few days later (June 23), more fortunately, he secures precedence for a motion 'in favour of the people' over one 'in the interests of a hundred or so rich individuals'. On July 1 he protests against the enforcement of an old rule under which the House can refuse to hear an address of gratitude from two released galley-slaves, only to be nick-named 'The convicts' counsel' (*avocat des galériens*). A few days later a very different reception is given to Paul Jones, and an American deputation, who ask leave to take part in the Fête of the 14th; but the House has no patience with the speech in which Robespierre tries to improve the occasion; constantly interrupted, it can be reported only in fragments, and Maury's ironical proposal to print it is ignored.

On August 2 a question of procedure became one of

privilege. Malouet had denounced the journalistic writings of Marat and Desmoulins. Marat had replied in his paper, Desmoulins in an address to the House. Malouet launched a fresh attack. 'Is he innocent? let him prove it. Is he guilty? I will conduct the case against him, and against anyone who takes up his defence. Let him justify his conduct if he dare.' Whereupon someone replied, from the public gallery, 'Yes, I dare!' It was said that the speaker was Desmoulins himself, and the President ordered his arrest. When his action was questioned, Robespierre defended it, but urged that Desmoulins had been guilty of no crime, and might well be released. The difficulty was happily solved by his escape; and the question of privilege was not pressed. The Assembly showed similar tact in refusing, under Robespierre's advice (August 2), to accept a motion censuring a committee of the Paris Commune.¹ Here may be added a question of procedure which arose on January 11, 1791, when Robespierre opposed the reference of reports on colonial affairs to the Colonial Committee, instead of to the Assembly itself. There were, no doubt, special reasons for such procedure in colonial questions, about which the average deputy knew little; but there was also some fear that the decision of them might be taken out of the hands of the House.

That the Assembly was seriously exercised about questions of procedure at this time is suggested not only by the incidents already described, but also by Menou's suggestions for reform;² and by the fact that, upon one occasion, when two speakers tried to shout one another down, the *Moniteur* printed their remarks in parallel columns, as though to hint its disapproval of such a breach of decorum. And, although Robespierre's anxiety to speak had twice led him into defying the rules of debate, yet in the main he stood by his declaration of August 28 in favour of orderly procedure.

¹A motion by Dubois and Desmeuniers to call the *Comité des recherches de la Commune de Paris* to the bar of the House, and to demand the disavowal of a Report.

²The *Opinion de M. Menou*, March 21, 1790, suggested that the Agenda for the next day's session should be posted up, that notice of motions should be given beforehand, and that the reports of committees should be taken point by point. (Brit. Mus. F.R. 54 (17).)

As a minority, sometimes a minority of one, he had everything to gain by it.

II

Another question which recurred throughout the year was that of the state of the countryside. Brought up in a provincial town, and educated in the capital, Robespierre had no special knowledge of country life, and only a deputy's interest in the point of view of the peasantry who had helped to elect him. He had, indeed, welcomed the relief from feudal burdens given by the decrees of August, 1789, and had taken a leading part in forcing the king to sanction them; but he had not intervened in discussions of the rights or wrongs of the peasant risings during that summer: he left that, perhaps, to the four *fermiers* who were his fellow-deputies. But now, in the spring of 1790, fresh troubles had broken out in Quercy, Limousin, Périgord, and parts of Brittany; and at Vernon a municipal officer in charge of a grain store had been rescued from a murderous mob by a young Englishman, who was rewarded with the first civic crown bestowed during the Revolution.¹ Should order be restored by force, or by conciliation? This was a point of statesmanship, not of agriculture; and Robespierre at once intervened. It was monstrous, he said, to characterize the peasantry as 'brigands', or to use force against a class more sinned against than sinning. At any rate, conciliation must first have failed.

Le Chapelier's bill for the restoration of order (February 22) was the occasion of another speech by Robespierre, to which the *Moniteur* devoted more space than it had ever before given him, and of which Desmoulins printed every word. There was no need, he maintained, for a policy of repression. 'There was never a revolution which cost so little blood, or so few cruelties.' The remedy lies in 'just laws, and the National Guard'. Let the people be free to express their will at the elections, without influence of aristocracy or army; and leave it to the armed citizens to deal

¹Christopher Nesham. (Mathiez, *La Vie Chère*, 23.)

with the few genuine 'brigands', and to defend their homes. This speech made a deep impression upon the House, and Desmoulins described the speaker, in the Latin they had learnt together at school, as 'a philanthropist in the true sense of the word, and a great intercessor for the people'—*Hic est vere fratrum amator, hic est qui multum orat pro populo*. But the supporters of force were alarmed, and interrupted Robespierre's renewed protests against their policy the following day. Do what he could, Le Chapelier's plan was adopted, and a new extension given to the principle of martial law.¹

It must not, however, be inferred that the Assembly was blind to the origin of the disorders it tried to suppress. Thus, some of the landlords were trying to exact compensation for their rights of *main-morte*, abolished on August 4: Robespierre proposed and carried a motion (February 27) that they should have none. Again, under an *ordonnance* of 1669 many of the *seigneurs* had seized a part of the common lands. Robespierre, in a careful review of the question (March 4), demanded not only the abolition of Enclosure—the *droit de triage*—but also the restitution of all lands seized under it during the last forty-six years. The Assembly accepted the first part of his proposal, but not the second. That he was specially interested in this question, and that he was on the whole satisfied with the result of the debate, is shown by the fact that he wrote to Buissart the same evening, telling him of the decree, and saying 'it goes further than many people thought possible'.²

It may be that in this matter of enclosures Robespierre's sympathy for the people blinded him to the real interests of agriculture, and therefore, in the long run, of the peasants themselves. The Revolution had brought to a head that controversy between 'small' and 'big' farming which had been going on for a large part of the eighteenth century. The members of the National Assembly, being mainly representatives of private property, showed more sympathy

¹*Encore une loi martiale*, was Loustalot's comment.

²Corresp. 26.

with the 'big' farming made possible by enclosures than with the peasants' demands for a return to the old common-land system, with its corollary of antiquated and inefficient farming. The settlement of March left untouched the main transferences of land under the *ordonnance* of 1669: they were not revised till the revolution of August, 1792. The peasantry found some compensation in the acquisition of 'national property', especially under the conditions of sale allowed by the Jacobin government of 1793-4, and in the freeing of the land from many feudal burdens. But upon the whole the Revolution ended, as it had begun, by furthering the interests of the farmers. In an agricultural country, they are the ultimate gainers both by war and revolution.¹

A few weeks later (April 21) another feudal relic—the game laws (*droit de chasse*)—was in question. The abolition of this monopoly on August 4 had resulted in an outbreak of popular sport which not only endangered the lives of travellers, but also threatened to exterminate every wild creature in the country. Merlin proposed the restoration of *la chasse*, not as a personal *droit*, but as attaching to landed property. Against this compromise Robespierre protested, partly on the principle of liberty, and partly in the interests of his constituents, the small farmers of Artois, who did not see why they should be forbidden to shoot the animals and birds which fed on their crops. He would have no game laws; only regulations to prevent sportsmen from damaging their neighbours' crops, or shooting the passer-by.

The reclamation of marshlands was another agricultural question in which Robespierre showed concern (May 1). He believed that it should be encouraged, but not by 'Grants in aid', which would only tempt speculators to reclaim unsuitable land.

Finally, we learn, from a little-known source, that Robespierre protested at the Jacobin Club (July 9) against his former patron Necker's attempt to reverse the decree of

¹Bloch, *Les caractères originaux de l'histoire rurale française*; Lefebvre, *Questions agraires aux temps de la Terreur*; Namier, *Skyscrapers: essays on Agrarian revolution, and The peasant and the State*.

June 19, abolishing titles of nobility—a measure which had more than superficial effects upon provincial society—and scoffed at that statesman's effrontery in setting his opinion against a decree 'dictated by Wisdom herself'.¹

Thus, though Robespierre might be out of touch with his constituents, he was not neglecting their interests, even in matters of which he had no special knowledge.

III

The abolition of *lettres de cachet* had been one of the first acts of the Revolution (August, 1789), and it had already been debated on October 12 what should be done with the victims of this system of arbitrary imprisonment. The subject came up again on January 5, March 13, and March 16. In October, Robespierre had resented any remedy that seemed to recognize or prolong an iniquitous institution. After three months' delay, he now takes a less intransigent line, demanding that those illegally arrested should be at once released, and all other cases reviewed by the Assembly. Two months later, it was still only proposed to release, in six weeks' time, men who had already spent ten months of 'the first year of liberty' in prison. 'It were better,' he exclaimed, in words which he might well have remembered in 1794, 'It were better that a hundred guilty men should be pardoned, than that a single innocent person should be punished'. But when (on March 16) it was debated what should be the maximum sentence to be inflicted upon those prisoners whose sentences on criminal charges had to be revised, he agreed with the general feeling that, in a time of revolution, such men should be kept in prison, though in no case (he thought) for more than twenty years. Here, he showed himself more merciful than the majority, who decided that those guilty of murder or arson should be re-imprisoned for life.

¹v. Duplain's *Courrier extraordinaire* (Fribourg in R.F. 59/52). Necker's *Opinion* appeared as a supplement to the *Moniteur* of July 2. The decree had been carried by a snap vote, many thought unconstitutionally (Paroy, *Mémoires*, 186 f.)

IV

As work on the new Constitution progressed, the question naturally came up, by what sanction should it be enforced? There were now two armed bodies in the country—the depleted ranks of the old army, and the new masses of the National Guard. But just as the sovereign power had passed from the crown to the people, so the armed control of the country had passed from the royal troops to the citizen levies; and the only real issue left was what form of oath should be exacted from these defenders of the new order. After a discursive debate (January 7), in which Robespierre argued that the National Guard should take a special oath to defend as well as to be faithful to the Constitution, it was decreed that all *milices nationales* should swear to be faithful to the nation, the law, and the king, and to maintain the Constitution and laws, ‘when required to do so by the authorities’.

The franchise settlement of October¹ still rankled in democratic minds. On January 23, Robespierre was able to show that, owing to the conversion of direct taxes (upon which the franchise rested) into other forms (*vingtièmes* and *impositions foncières*), many of his Artois constituents were automatically deprived of the vote; and he secured a temporary exemption of this and some other districts so affected from the provisions of the *marc d’argent* decree. But he failed to obtain a similar favour for St. Jean de Luz (April 17); and was hard driven to explain how it was that, in spite of such concessions, there was a general unwillingness, throughout the provinces, to pay any taxes at all.² How keenly he felt on the whole question may be inferred from his refusal to accept the complete exemption of ‘passive’ citizens from taxation (October 23). He insisted, as he had always done, that the franchise was part of the natural rights of every citizen, and he would have nothing to do with

¹v. 1/70.

²March 25, an elaborate apologia; it was not lack of patriotism (he said), but fear of national bankruptcy, and counter-revolution.

any concession that recognized the distinction between 'active' and 'passive' citizenship.

By this implacable hostility to the property franchise—Hamel calls it his *delenda Carthago*—Robespierre won fresh supporters, but also created fresh enemies. The *comité patriotique* of Lille wrote to congratulate him, and he sent them copies of his *Adresse au peuple belge*, and other works dealing with the subject.¹ A *procureur du Roi* at Soissons expressed admiration for his patriotism, and reported 'aristocratic plots' in that town.² On the other hand, attempts were made to prove that he had incited his constituents to refuse payment of taxes. Lambert, the Controller-general of finance, quoted an alleged letter of his, saying that people need not pay the duty on wine (*droits d'aide*). Robespierre repudiated the letter: it had been forged, he said, by some counter-revolutionist. The charge was revived in a more subtle way by Briois de Beaumetz, a relation of Buissart's, and deputy for the *noblesse* of Artois, with whom Robespierre had fallen out during the elections of 1789. Following an altercation in the House, Beaumetz wrote a letter accusing him of having charged the Artois people with failure to pay their taxes. This damaging perversion of the speeches of January 23 and April 17 reached Augustin, and he passed it on to his brother. Maximilien penned an indignant reply, in which, after explaining the origin of Beaumetz's misrepresentation, he asked the electors to contrast his unsullied record as a patriot with that of Beaumetz, the champion of the royalist Estates of Artois. This reply he kept back till the eve of the departmental elections in June, when he published it with good effect; and appended a testimonial from his fellow-members of the Artois deputation.

'Although M. Robespierre,' ran this document, 'needs no other testimony to his patriotism than that of his conduct, and of his public reputation, we have much pleasure in giving him proof of the esteem and affection with which he

¹Corresp. 24 (February 12).

²Corresp. 25 (February 14).

is regarded by all his colleagues. . . . He has always zealously defended the cause of the people at large, and of public liberty, as well as the special interests of Artois. *Signed: Fleury, du Buisson, Boucher, Payen, de Croix, Brassart, Charles de Lameth, Députés d'Artois.*¹

Here may be added, as not inappropriate under the head of constitutional questions, some lesser occasions on which Robespierre pursued his quarrel with the 'executive power', as the king was now called. On July 3 he moved for a reduction in the number and salaries of the managers of the Royal Lottery—an institution of which, in any case, he would have disapproved.² On August 22 he opposed a petition from Béarn against the sale of the Château de Pau, the birthplace of Henri IV, on the ground that nothing should be done to increase the *domaine royale*. And the following day, in a discussion on the *postes et messageries*, he carried an amendment doing away with the royal privilege, which had given so much entertainment to Louis XV, of interfering with the privacy of the post. It was consistent with this attitude that when, on August 1, a deputation was sent to the king to assure him of the attachment of the Assembly, Robespierre should propose another deputation to take part in the memorial ceremony in honour of those killed in the attack on the Bastille.

V

Of the questions whose main development belongs to the year 1790, the two most important were the church settlement, and the departmental and municipal reorganization of the country.

No part of the work of the Assembly had more serious effects on the Revolution, and none has been more generally condemned, than the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. What part did Robespierre play in it?

¹For this *Nota* v. Brit. Mus. F. 852 (4). It is to be noticed that de Croix and Lameth take the places of Vaillant and Petit, two of the original deputies. For the controversy with Beaumetz, a confusing series of letters. v. Corresp. 33-40.

²v. the debate on the *tontine* (1/118).

It was partly due to the ecclesiastical atmosphere of his school and college life, as well as to his private or professional relations with the clergy, that Maximilien was at this time, and perhaps always, less anti-clerical than his brother Augustin, whose letters from Arras are full of unbalanced attacks on the church. His outburst of June 6, 1789, had been prompted by exasperation with dignitaries who misrepresented the rank and file of the priesthood, and was, in effect, a plea for a return to primitive Christianity. He was doubtless familiar with the chapter in the *Contrat Sociale* in which his hero Jean Jacques declared that Christianity, properly understood, was too unworldly to be a state religion, and in which he outlined the 'civic religion' necessary for the healthy life of society. But how far had Robespierre moved, by the end of 1789, away from the one set of influences, or towards the other? Let us see.

The nationalization of church revenues, upon which the Civil Constitution was based, came up indirectly, and from an unexpected quarter. The abbé Maury proposed that the miseries of the Paris poor should be relieved by abolishing the city dues (*octroi*) on food, and by imposing a tax on luxuries. Another priest, Collaud de la Salcette, suggested the reduction of all clerical stipends over 1,000 *écus* a year, and the confiscation of the revenues of all benefices worth over 3,000 net. Robespierre supported this amendment, which so much resembled his own advice of June 6, and laid down the principle upon which the whole policy of the Revolution in this matter was based. 'Church property,' he declared, 'belongs to the people; and to demand that the clergy shall use it to help the people is merely to re-apply it to its original purpose'. In the full-dress debate on the Civil Constitution (May 31) he showed that he was prepared for a thorough reorganization of the church as a department of the revolutionary state. 'Priests,' he said, 'considered as members of society, are simply magistrates whose duty it is to maintain and carry on public worship'. It follows that all useless ecclesiastical offices, such as archbishoprics and cardinalates, should be abolished, and only those retained

which are required to meet the public need; that ecclesiastics, like other public officials, should be appointed by popular election; and that they should be paid on the same scale: and these propositions he defended in detail in the debates that followed, refusing, for instance, even to allow the clergy a share in clerical elections, lest their class vote might sully the pure expression of the popular will.

So far, Robespierre's views met with general agreement in an Assembly whose members, without any distinct animus against the church, were unconsciously reverting to the strictest Gallicanism of the Bourbons, whilst putting the people in the place of the king. But he went on to make a suggestion which was very differently received—which, indeed, the House would not even allow him to formulate—the marriage of clergy. A few nights before, at the Jacobin Club (May 26), the abbé de Courmand¹ had proposed the abolition of clerical celibacy, on the ground that it would empty the convents, make the clergy forget their property rights, and fulfil a 'law of nature'. Numbers of pamphlets both for and against clerical marriage had been appearing during the past year; and Robespierre knew that he had many of the clergy on his side. But, by making the suggestion public, he not only offended the bishops, who feared that they would have less authority over a married than over a celibate priesthood, but also alienated his own supporters in the House, who were loud in their dissent, and his constituents, few of whom were prepared for so drastic a change. Brissot, in the *Patriote français*, whilst approving the suggestion, said that it was premature, and would cause agitation among ignorant people.² 'Your motion for the marriage of priests', wrote Augustin from Arras, 'has given you the reputation of an unbeliever amongst all our great philosophers of Artois. . . . You will lose the esteem of the peasantry, if you renew this proposal. People are using it as a weapon against you: they talk of nothing but your

¹He had been a *professeur* of literature at the Collège de France since 1784. He married in 1791, and published his views in a pamphlet (R.F. 58/507).

²A.R. 11/31 s.

irreligion, and so forth. Perhaps you had better not give it any more support'.¹ On the other hand, Robespierre had spoken what was in the minds of many of the clergy; for he received letters of congratulation from all over the country, and so many copies of monastic verse, in Latin, French, Greek, and even Hebrew, that, as he observed to his 'secretary,' Villiers, it could not be true that France had ceased to produce poets.²

One of these—a Latin poem on the Constitution, by the bishop of Liège—was sent him by a young priest at Amiens, whose letter reminded Robespierre of a 'solemn undertaking' he had made him some time ago to work for clerical marriage, and for a more generous provision for the religious Orders.³ He had now redeemed the first part of his promise, without counting the risk to his own reputation: he was soon to redeem the second also. On February 19, June 22, and June 28, the House had to decide what pensions should be granted to ecclesiastics who had lost their livelihood through the reorganization of the church. With respect to ex-monks, thrown upon the world through no choice of their own, Robespierre insisted that the wealth of the suppressed Orders was immense, and that their members ought to be more generously treated.⁴ Towards ex-bishops he showed little sympathy. They deserved less consideration, he said, than the common clergy, who 'have grown old in the Ministry, and who, at the end of a long life's work, have earned nothing but infirmities. The latter claim consideration as clergy; they claim it even more as paupers'.

Some minor questions arising out of the Civil Constitu-

¹Corresp. 39.

²Villiers, *Souvenirs d'un déporté*.

³Lefetz, July 11 (Corresp. 44); translated by Lewes, 135; cp. Lebon's letter of June, 1791 (Corresp. 73).

⁴A paper published in view of the decree of June 23, 1790, gave a list of all archbishoprics, bishoprics, and abbeys, with their revenues. There Robespierre could read that his old patron, bishop Conzié of Arras, drew a stipend of 92,000 *livres*, and that the income of the abbey of Saint-Vaast was 400,000 *livres* (Brit. Mus. F. 61*). It is worth noting that the Prior of the Dominicans from whom the Jacobin Club rented its premises had, on May 31, claimed preferential treatment for his Order. (Duplain's *Courrier extraordinaire*, v. Fribourg in R.F. 58/507.)

tion had still to be settled. We find Robespierre supporting Beauharnais' proposal (September 14) that priests shall be allowed to wear 'mufti' when off duty: it would, he thought, mark their equality with civilians, and their status as national officials. We find him, again (August 28) opposing the suggestion that priests should be eligible as magistrates, on the ground that the clergy should confine themselves to spiritual functions, and that plurality of offices is bad democracy. On the other hand he is against the proposal to exempt priests from serving on juries (February 5), using the curious argument that to judge criminals is an act of benevolence towards society, and therefore not unbecoming to a minister of religion.

What can be inferred, from these incidents, as to Robespierre's attitude towards church questions? They are, at least, evidence that he had two great convictions. The first was that Christianity is a religion of simplicity and poverty. This belief had prompted his outburst on June 6: it was this that he expressed, as clearly as possible, when he said, in the debate on clerical salaries a year later (June 16), 'The poor and beneficent author of our religion advised the rich young man to divide his wealth with the poor; and his intention was that his ministers should be poor men'. His second conviction was that society needed religion, and that the State should organize a department for this purpose—that is, a church. Only, it need not create one *de novo*; for there was a national branch of the Catholic church ready to hand—a church, many of whose clergy were already working for the repudiation of the Concordat, the nationalization of ecclesiastical revenues, and popular election of bishops and clergy.¹ There was no idea as yet of a new church, or a new worship.

VI

A number of questions about departmental and municipal government came before the Assembly during 1790. What

¹Lav. 1/185.

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is Robespierre's attitude towards this essential aspect of the new regime?

His ruling instinct is for liberty; his prevailing sympathy, for the people. He objects to any prohibition of the export of corn (January 16), not as a free-trader, but as one who fears that it will hinder the circulation of grain within the country, and cause distress among the poor. He resents any attempt to snub the rather futile generosity of the *contributions patriotiques* (March 26)—free gifts of plate, jewellery, and other valuables to the Treasury. The town of Rouen asks leave for its Corporation to raise a loan for the relief of the unemployed (January 7); the municipality of Dieppe begs for assistance in dealing with local disorder (April 29). In both cases he insists that the whole body of the citizens shall be consulted.

Considerable discontent was being caused, at this time, by the presence of royal commissioners in the provinces: it was feared that they would use their power of supervising local elections to secure the appointment of royalist or reactionary candidates. When, therefore, Le Chapelier proposed to meet the objections by withdrawing the commissioners after the elections were over, Robespierre denounced what he described as an attempt to *sabotage* the machinery of the Revolution, and did so in such forcible terms that his speech was shouted down by the royalists, praised by Mirabeau, and printed in full by *Le Hérault national*.¹ Hamel may well say that it was a valuable and prophetic appeal for Government neutrality at elections.

A more troublesome and significant question was that of the reorganization of the municipality of Paris (May 3). The Constitutional Committee proposed to replace the sixty Districts into which the capital had hitherto been divided by forty-eight Sections, and to allow these sections to meet only at certain times. The Districts—electoral divisions set up by the *règlement royal* of April 13, 1789, and organized into a municipality by an *arrêté municipal* of August 30—had perpetuated themselves as political debating clubs; and they

¹Also as a pamphlet—*Discours sur l'organisation des municipalités*.

had become 'permanent'—that is, they had maintained the right to call *assemblées générales* at any time to discuss questions of public interest; whilst their functions, especially in police matters, had been carried out by standing committees. Valuing their independence, they argued not only that 'permanence' was a corollary of the right of free assembly, but also that Paris was better governed by the direct action of the separate Districts than it would be by any joint action of their representatives. They stood, indeed, not so much for the right of the Districts to govern Paris, as for the right of each of the sixty Districts to govern itself. The proposals of the Constitutional Committee rejected both these claims. They were, in effect, an attempt to transfer the control of the National Guard from the City to the Assembly, and to put an end to the growing opposition, on the part of popular clubs and meetings, to the dictatorship of the National Government.

Robespierre, attacking the Committee's proposals from this obvious angle, found himself unexpectedly applauded by his old enemies of the Right, who found the 'permanent' sub-divisions of the capital a favourable sphere for counter-revolution; the fact being that, until the Assembly (in September, 1793) decided that poor citizens should be paid for attending their sectional assemblies, the control of these meetings fell into the hands of the well-to-do, who could afford to attend them, and of whose reactionary influence the patriots constantly complained. The sectionalism of Paris was, in fact, the same thing, on a smaller scale, as the 'regionalism' of France—that tendency of the whole to split up into self-governing parts which always threatened national unity, and which Robespierre himself and his Jacobin friends denounced, two years later, as 'federalism', the besetting sin of their Girondist opponents. Robespierre's enthusiasm for freedom had blinded him, for the moment, to this important issue, and he played into the hands of the Opposition. But the Assembly as a whole distrusted extremists, and adopted the plan of the Committee, leaving Robespierre to the ambiguous praises of the

press, in which Loustalot, at any rate, celebrated his 'heroic' stand for the 'sacred rights of the people'.

The full significance of this incident could not be seen at the time. If the Assembly had been able to foresee the part that would be played by the Paris Commune a year later, it might have welcomed the movement for sectionalism, instead of condemning it. The more autonomy the Sections were allowed, the more they would disagree with one another, and the less fear there would be of their combining against the Assembly. In attempting, by the *Loi municipale* of June 27, to suppress both the Commune and the Sections, the Assembly was storing up a dangerous explosive. Paris, unable to rule itself, tried to rule France. The popular interventions of July 14 and October 5, 1789, had saved parliamentary government: those of August, 1792, and May, 1793, went far to destroy it.¹

A final group of incidents, under the general head of municipal government, may be mentioned here. It was proposed that theatrical performances should be censored by the municipal authorities (January 13). Robespierre objected. 'Public opinion,' he boldly declared, 'is the sole judge of good taste'. An election was to be held, to fill Lafayette's place as Commandant of the National Guard at Versailles. On various pretexts the election was postponed; and the popular party suspected an intrigue to foist a royalist upon them. Robespierre intervened on their behalf (June 29). He was not successful; but they remembered his help, and not long afterwards elected him to a judgeship in the local tribunal.²

When France was rearranged in new Departments, a capital and a cathedral town had to be found for the Pas-de-Calais. It was at first proposed that the cathedral town should be Saint-Omer (July 6). But Robespierre, supported for once by his enemy Beaumetz, got the plan held up; and finally succeeded in making his native Arras the capital both of the Department and of the Diocese.

¹Mellié, *Les sections de Paris*; Garrigues, *Les districts parisiens pendant la Révolution française*; Foubert in R.F. 28/141.

²v. 1/106.

The local politics of Soissons had already troubled the Assembly. A dispute between the municipal and district authorities about the qualification for the franchise, involving the rights of a third of the voters, was reported in February. Robespierre had received private information as to the facts, and had promised to help. When, therefore, on July 20, the municipality of the town complained that the *Bailliage* had interfered with its regulation of the food supply, he intervened, supporting the right of the town to manage its own affairs. Even when, two months later, the townsfolk took matters into their own hands so far as to confiscate a supply of grain intended for Metz, he attempted to excuse them.¹ On July 22 he insisted that a deputation from Montant should be heard at the bar of the House: it was the best way to 'ward off evils that threatened the patriots of that town'.

Thus at Rouen, at Dieppe, at Soissons, at Troyes, in Paris, at Versailles, at Montant, and (in a sense) at Arras, Robespierre stood for the right of the people as a whole, embodied in their communal government, to represent their own wishes, and to regulate their own affairs—whether loans, elections, public entertainments, or matters of police—without interference by the central government. No doubt he favoured the people partly because he feared the anti-democratic dictatorship of the Assembly. But he was also possessed by the ruling idea of freedom, and by that belief in the essential soundness of popular judgment in which he comes so near to the standpoint of nineteenth-century Liberalism.

This only makes it the more remarkable that he should have entered no protest against the most serious attack upon popular liberty made by the Assembly—the *Loi le Chapelier* of June 14. If he felt so strongly about the attempt to limit the right of petition (May 9), why did he not strain every nerve against a law which prohibited any association of working-men, and put into the hands of their employers a

¹For Gouillard's letter to Robespierre, and his reply (February 14), v. Corresp. 25; R.H.R.F. 8/303.

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system of penalties which 'lay heavy upon the French working-classes for seventy-five years'? True, the measure was disguised as part of a general attack on *corporations* which was entirely congenial to the Revolution; its class bias, and its economic consequences, could not be fully appreciated at a time when Labour was still so unorganized; Prudhomme and Desmoulins made no comment upon it, and even Marat saw in it a royalist and moderate attack on the nation, not a bourgeois weapon against the proletariat. Indeed, the middle-class employers themselves, who were most to benefit by the law, do not seem to have realized the significance of it. There was, in fact, little or no class consciousness on either side at this stage of the Revolution. But should not Robespierre have been more alert? Perhaps he merely shared the general neglect of economic factors. Perhaps his tendency to see all the Revolution as the work of the people blinded him more than others to the class character of this legislation. But perhaps—and this simple explanation cannot be excluded—he was not in his place at the time. He was only twice present at the Jacobins between May 31 and June 16. Illness may have kept him away from the Assembly on June 14.¹

VII

A lawyer, whose ideas of legal reform had already offended the Arras bar, Robespierre was likely to play a large part in the reorganization of the judicial system undertaken by the Assembly during 1790 and 1791. We find him, in fact, reported as speaking more than twenty times, and upon every branch of the subject. Shall judges sit in fixed courts, or go on circuit? In what form shall their patents of institution be drawn? What is the function of a court of appeal, and how ought it to be composed? How should the Public Prosecutor be appointed? Shall the police be given magisterial powers? How should a jury be selected? Must it be required to find an unanimous verdict? Can it bring

¹Jaurès 2/267; Soreau in A.H. 8/287; Pontlas in A.R. 4/175; Sée in A.R. 14/373.

in a verdict of 'Not Proven'? Where shall be the seat of the Supreme Tribunal? Such are a few of the problems upon which we have Robespierre's opinion; as well as some matters of wider bearing, or of local and temporary interest, which fall under the same general head. And since Robespierre's mind was of the kind that looks behind particular cases for general principles, the study of these speeches has a more than technical interest.

He was insistent upon the principle of popular election. It should be extended (he thought) to the office of Public Prosecutor (*accusateur public*); for does he not represent the national vengeance for crimes committed against the people (August 4)? And it should be made clear, in every judge's patent of office, that he holds his authority from the nation, not from the king (May 8). Courts of first instance should be fixed, but appeals should be heard on circuit (May 2).

There should be two supreme courts, Robespierre thought—one for appeal and one for political crimes. Upon the need of the first—a *cour de cassation*—there was general agreement; but Robespierre could not persuade the House to make it, not merely a legal tribunal, but also, like Napoleon's Senate, or the Supreme Court of the U.S.A., the guardian of the Constitution (May 25).

The suggestion of a supreme criminal court (*haute cour nationale*) raised more difficult questions. The case of two deputies charged with connivance in the escape of a political prisoner (August 23) brought out the fact that there was no court—certainly not, as was suggested, the unpopular Châtelet—which commanded enough confidence to deal with so serious a charge.¹ In a series of speeches (October 25, November 10, 18), Robespierre urged that there must be a supreme court to deal with charges of *lèse-nation*; it must be composed of 'friends of the Revolution' elected by the people; it must be given power to crush all political traitors; and its seat must be in Paris—the city which has rendered

¹The abbé Perrotin, *dit* Barmond, and Foucauld, had helped Bonne-Savardin to escape. The Châtelet, retained as part of the district police system of Paris under a decree of November 5, 1789, had gradually been ousted from its functions by the District Committees (Garrigues, *Les districts parisiens*, 56, 65).

so many services to the Revolution, and which has always been the centre of enlightenment'. Save for the last suggestion—it was considered that the Court would be more independent if it met at Orleans—his plan was adopted.

It is curious to find, in regard to both these courts, how little respect Robespierre, himself a lawyer, has for the legal point of view. The functions of the *haute cour* might, perhaps, excuse its being composed of patriotic laymen; but there would seem to have been little reason why the *cour de cassation* should not include the best lawyers in the land. Nevertheless, we find Robespierre declaring that, since its chief function is to prevent other courts from setting up a law of their own, its judges need not themselves be lawyers. 'Indeed,' he remarks (November 18), 'the word jurisprudence ought to be struck out of the French vocabulary. In a state possessing a constitution and a legislature the courts need no jurisprudence but the text of the law'. This was to anticipate the administration of justice in a modern state which has also broken down the old professional monopolies, and where 'there are special courses for magistrates, but on the whole one trusts one's class intuition'.¹ Robespierre, whether he knew it or not, was not so eager to reform the judicial system as he was to transfer judicial power from the officers of the crown, and the privileged courts, to the representatives of the people. The mere fact that it was in the hands of patriots would, he fancied, make it pure. So a way was prepared to the Revolutionary Tribunal, the Law of Suspects, and the proscriptions of 1794.

A number of questions affecting the lower courts also came up for decision at this time. It was Robespierre who proposed and carried the institution of courts-martial (*conseils de guerre*) on which officers and men sat side by side (April 28): it was unfair, he said, for officers to sit alone in judgment on their men. It was he who foresaw the failure of the family courts (*tribunaux arbitraires de parents*) by means of which the Assembly hoped to prevent litigation between

¹Huxley, *A Scientist among the Soviets*, 24.

close relations (August 5).¹ It was he who opposed the granting of magisterial powers to the officers of the *gendarmerie* and *maréchaussée* (December 27), because he considered that they were unfit for such responsibility²—an action in which he was supported by a petition from the Jacobin Club at Marseille.³

There remains the jury system, which came up for discussion early in February, 1791. Robespierre, who had already made known his belief in this democratic institution,⁴ intervened several times in the debates. The committee proposed majority verdicts: Robespierre, not that he had any knowledge of, or respect for English procedure, but because he had been impressed by a case quoted in his *Eloge de Dupaty*, in which the vote of one judge had prevented a serious miscarriage of justice, preferred the Anglo-American requirement of unanimity. A minority, he said, remembering Rousseau, may be right or wrong, but unanimity is a sacrament of the general will. If the old law had required a unanimous verdict, Calas would never have been condemned. If it were only to save one innocent life in a century, such a rule would still be worth having. But he did not persuade the House (February 2). Next day, dealing with the old process called *plus ample informé*, his plea for mercy was more successful, and it was decided that a man could not be twice indicted under the same charge. He was again in a minority in proposing the admission of written as well as oral evidence (January 4), the indemnification of persons wrongfully accused, and the removal of the 'feudal' formula *sur mon honneur* from the juryman's oath (February 3); but carried his point, the same day, that imprisonment was too severe a penalty for failure to surrender to a summons. As to the method of appointing juries—a question on which he had tried in vain to speak on January 20—he thought it dangerous, in a time of revolution, to leave their

¹The *tribunal* was first modified into a *conseil*, and then abolished by Napoleon.

²The *gendarmerie* jurisdiction would also have been a check on the *accusateur public* (Lav. 1/129; cp. Michon, *Adrien Dupont*, 166).

³Corresp. 57.

⁴April 17, 1790, *Discours de Robespierre pour l'établissement des jurés en toute matière*.

selection (as Duport proposed) to the *procureur-général-syndic*, or any other single official, and undemocratic to exclude (as Cazalès would) all but proprietors: 'We cannot have the factions (he said) . . . using the courts as a cloak for private warfare' (February 5). This last speech ranks amongst Robespierre's most ambitious efforts in oratory. He had it printed, and sent copies of it to his friends.¹

There were, of course, protests from interested quarters against the suppression of the old courts, and the setting up of a new system. One of these, by the Parlement of Toulouse, roused a storm; for Robespierre attacked the *garde des sceaux* for bringing it up, and hinted at the collusion of the crown, in such terms that he was shouted down, and did not speak again in the House for three weeks (October 5). There was also one part of the old system—that by which an accused man could choose whom he would of the *procureurs* to defend him—which Robespierre preferred to the Assembly's proposal to licence only a limited number of counsel in each district; and one innovation—the attachment of royal commissioners to the departmental tribunals—which he successfully opposed (March 30).

VIII

An Englishman, with centuries of national training behind him, finds it difficult to understand the French theory of justice. That difficulty is less than it might be, in the present instance, because there was, in the early years of the Revolution, a tendency to reform the French judicial system on the English model—to adopt the jury, or assizes, or a parliamentary court of appeal. Yet, even so, large parts of Robespierre's policy remain puzzling. His principles are not ours. His anxiety lest the courts should be captured by political parties, or used by the crown against the people; his insistence upon the need of a special tribunal to deal with charges of *lèse-nation*; his notion that judges need have no

¹*Principes de l'organisation des jurés*; sent to the Jacobin Club at Versailles (Corresp. 63) and to Mme Chalabre (Corresp. 60).

expert knowledge of the law; or the precautions which he thinks necessary in the appointment of jurymen;—upon what do they rest at bottom, except a conception of the state, and of the relation between the government and the law-courts, very different from any that has been held in England since the end of the seventeenth century? When he insists, as he does at every turn, upon popular control of the judicial system, he is not really coming much closer to our standpoint than did Louis XIV, or Napoleon. He by no means gets rid of that intervention of political authority which, to our minds, makes havoc of impartial justice. He merely turns the old system inside out, and replaces the influence of the crown by influence of the people. When, after abolishing the old privileged and overlapping jurisdictions, he proposes to set up a special tribunal to deal with political crimes, it is not because such cases are more difficult to decide than others, but because, in French eyes, they must be dealt with more drastically. The ordinary courts might be too fair. Again, if the judges need not be lawyers, it is because the law which they have to administer is not, like ours, a formless congeries of legal precedents, but a neatly-printed book of rules. Or, if the appointment of jurymen demands elaborate safeguards, it is because they are regarded, not as typical 'men in the street', who will be conducted by considerate counsel along familiar routes of evidence, and directed by an impartial judge at the ultimate cross-roads, but as the audience at a debate, the spectators of a drama, the referees in a judicial contest, where no evidence will be excluded, and no methods left untried, to cheat or bully them into a verdict. They must therefore, even for ordinary purposes, be specially picked men, professional experts in human nature, and, for political trials, staunch supporters of the government of the day, whose duty and right it is to secure a conviction.

Allowance being once made for this unfamiliar background, it is possible to sum up Robespierre's contribution to judicial reform as beginning and ending in the principle of popular control. It is, in fact, not a lawyer's contribution,

but a politician's. He is not concerned, ultimately, with the impartial administration of justice, but with the transference of judicial power from the classes to the masses. And what this was to mean, within the next few years, can be studied in the records of the Revolutionary Tribunal.

IX

The existence of a regular army and navy side by side with a national militia was sure to lead to difficulties. One of the first was at Toulon, where, as has already been seen, the National Guard had thrown certain officers of the naval garrison into prison.¹ When the incident came up again in the Assembly (January 16), Robespierre upheld the action of the citizens against the navy under Article II of the Declaration of Rights, which included 'resistance to oppression' among the 'natural and imprescriptible' rights of man; and he subsequently opposed de Rions' request to be allowed to attend the Fête of Federation, and to take the civic oath in the name of the fleet, on the ground that his patriotism was not so certain as his courage (July 5). He showed a similar animus against military officers on May 21, suggesting that they, rather than their men, were responsible for acts of insubordination in the army; and on June 10, when he complained of attempts to stiffen up discipline. When, on August 19, the House debated the question of naval punishments, he declared that it was not only cruel, but also inconsistent with the principle of equality, that a seaman should be made to 'run the gauntlet', whilst an officer was merely dismissed the service. The result of the debate was a decree (August 22) which distinguished *peines de discipline*, inflicted by officers, from *peines afflictives*, which could be imposed only by a *conseil de justice*. Capital punishment could only be inflicted by this court. But the punishments still allowed at the discretion of the officers were severe enough to cause mutinies, and the decree was

¹v. 1/70n. The Commandant, de Rions, had dismissed two dockyard hands for wearing the cockade of the National Guard.

rescinded only two months later (October 27). Thus Robespierre's view was vindicated; and he deserves credit for protesting against a barbarous code of punishment, which most people at this time, in England as well as France, took for granted.¹

The whole question of army discipline came to a head this same summer in a serious mutiny at Nancy. The disagreements, to which the Revolution naturally gave rise, between 'aristocrat' officers and 'patriot' rank and file, and which had already led to disorders at Béthune, Perpignan, and other places, were accentuated at Nancy among the garrison troops, and the Swiss of Châteaueux's Vaudois regiment, by a strong suspicion that the regimental funds were being mismanaged. In answer to the men's complaints the officers' accounts were examined; but by other officers. They sent a deputation to Paris: Lafayette threw it into prison. The methods adopted by another officer to investigate the accounts caused fresh disturbances, which Bouillé repressed by force of arms. Twenty men of the Swiss regiment were hanged, and forty-one sent to the galleys. The mutiny was over; but the methods employed to end it caused bitter dissension between the parties of order and liberty in Paris. At first the opinion of the Assembly was all for order, and Robespierre was almost alone in opposing its vote of thanks to Bouillé (September 3). But soon his protest, backed by the Jacobin Club,² led to popular demonstrations in favour of the 'heroes' of the Châteaueux regiment—anticipating those which, a year later, were a prelude to the fall of the throne; and there was a revival of the wearing of the *bonnet rouge*—the sailors' cap of the galley-slaves—as a symbol of true patriotism.³

This was partly why, when another mutiny broke out in the Royal-Champagne regiment at Hesdin, and thirty-six men were dismissed the service, the Assembly took a more merciful view, censuring the officers, and arranging for the re-employment of their 'victims'; though motions of censure

¹cp. Michon, *La justice militaire sous la Révolution*, in A.R. 14/1.

²A.H. 6/556.

³Lav. 1/244.

on the Minister of War and the Mayor of Hesdin, proposed by Sallé and Robespierre, were not carried.

Discipline, whether civil or military, is foreign to a time of revolution. The Assembly of 1790, partly because it was still monarchist at heart, and partly because mutiny in the army produced a sudden feeling of insecurity, was ready to support repression. But it is not surprising to find Robespierre, and the few who, like him, were thorough believers in liberty and democracy, passionate anti-disciplinarians.¹ History is ironical. Within three years these very men, with Robespierre at their head, were trying to enforce on army and civilians alike one of the most drastic disciplines to which France ever submitted. Were they sincere, both in 1790 and in 1793? Yes; for by liberty they meant liberty for patriots, and that might involve, for non-patriots, the prison and the guillotine; and by democracy they meant government in the name, but not necessarily in the hands of the people: a policy which was detestable under a Bourbon might be admirable under a Committee of Public Safety.

X

There remains only the important heading of foreign affairs. During 1789 the Revolution was the private concern of Frenchmen; but, with the spread of revolutionary ideas outside France, such isolation became impossible.

The first sign of the change came from Corsica, where the slow extension of revolutionary ideas, and criticisms of Paoli's regime, encouraged the Genoese to protest against the incorporation of the island in the system of revolutionary government, and to reassert claims to sovereignty which they were thought to have surrendered in 1768. Both Mirabeau and Robespierre believed that these demands would not have been made without the support of England, which had a naval interest in the island; and the House let them 'lie on the table'.

¹It has been suggested, perhaps with less likelihood, that they were intentionally undermining the army, in order to facilitate the establishment of Jacobin control (Ward, 110).

This was in January. Four months later a more serious crisis arose over the dispute between England and Spain for the ownership of Nootka Sound, on the Pacific coast of North America. Montmorin, the Foreign Minister, abruptly announced that the King had ordered the mobilization of a French fleet. This sudden danger of war not unnaturally alarmed the House, and two issues became urgent: how were negotiations with foreign powers to be conducted, and in whose hands lay the right of declaring war? Speaking on May 11, Robespierre urged the House to keep the negotiations in its own hands, and to adopt a conciliatory attitude. Speaking again on the 18th, he denied that the king had the right to declare war as the representative (*représentant*) of the nation. The king, he said, 'is merely the agent (*commis*) and delegate (*délégué*) of the nation for the execution of its wishes'. When some members protested against such language, he repeated himself more politely, defining *commis* to mean the *emploi suprême* and *charge sublime* of executing the general will. His sentiment, if not his language, was that of the majority of the members; and the debate ended in agreement on the formula (May 22)—'War can be declared only by a decree of the Legislative Body passed after a formal proposal by the king, and subsequently sanctioned by him'. This was regarded as a notable victory for the Revolution; and at the end of the session the leading Jacobins, Robespierre and Pétion among them, were escorted through the Tuileries gardens by a cheering crowd. It was noticed, and taken by some for an omen, that the young Dauphin, attracted by the excitement, appeared at a window of the palace, and clapped his hands.¹

Still under the influence of this crisis, Robespierre saw in the proposal to send a relief ship to the distressed island of Tabago (June 30) a fresh danger of war, and drew upon himself the ironical suggestion that he had better go to the Antilles, and investigate the facts for himself. But a not dissimilar proposal, put forward a month later (July 4) by certain deputies interested in foreign trade, that the king

¹cp. 1/107.

should be asked to commission a number of frigates for the protection of French merchant shipping, justified his fears; though he had little ground for suggesting that the situation was being exploited by enemies of the Revolution.

The case of the Avignon prisoners was of a different kind. The town of Avignon and the district of the Venaissin, with its capital Carpentras, had formed a Papal enclave within French territory ever since the fourteenth century. Their union with revolutionary France had been proposed as early as November, 1789, and the agitation was brought to a head by a revolt at Avignon, in June, 1790, by which the anti-Papal majority drove out the Cardinal-Legate, and imprisoned some of their opponents. From this movement the Venaissin stood aloof. The Assembly debated a difficult position from time to time during the year. On July 10 Robespierre opposed the release of the prisoners until the facts were fully known. On November 18 he was ready with a speech, reported at unusual length in the *Moniteur*, and subsequently printed, in which he argued for the incorporation of the disputed territory. Avignon, he declared, could not be the Pope's property; for how could any people be the property of an individual? Nor would its *réunion* to France be an instance of that 'conquest' which the Assembly had so solemnly renounced. It was their duty to accede to the request of the Avignonese; the more so as their decision would make this strategical corner of the country 'either the support or the scourge of the constitution,' either a centre of armed opposition, or 'the bulwark of France against her foreign foes'.

It was, indeed, arguable that *réunion* was the only way to prevent the spread of federal ideas in the Departments of the Midi, where royalism was never more alive.¹ Yet it was almost certain that the annexation of Avignon would cause a rupture with the Papacy, particularly undesirable at a moment when the fate of the new church settlement depended on the Pope's acquiescence. To this danger Robespierre seems to have been blinded by his zeal for

¹Vignier in R.F. 21/424, 23/149, 26/150.

self-determination, and, perhaps also, by his dislike for the hierarchy.

Meanwhile there had been fresh rumours of war. On the very day after Marat's alarmist pamphlet, 'It's all up with us!' (*C'en est fait de nous!*) (July 26), news came that a detachment of Austrian troops had been allowed to cross French territory into Brabant, without leave of the Assembly. D'Aiguillon moved to censure Montmorin, Mirabeau the Prince de Condé. Robespierre was against both proposals. Behind Montmorin, he said, were the court and the Ministers, behind Condé the counter-revolution. Let a day be fixed for discussing the best way to deal with all enemies of the Revolution. For this attempt to widen the issue, he was congratulated by the royalist press as a defender of their hero Condé, and promised that, instead of being 'a very long-winded speaker on the revolutionary side of the House' he would in future be 'one of the pleasantest and wittiest speakers among the aristocrats'.¹

On August 25 a Report of the Diplomatic Committee, presented by Mirabeau, proposed to confirm the 'Family Compact' with Spain, in the form of a defensive and commercial alliance. Robespierre pleaded for reconsideration, but was only able to postpone the adoption of the Report till the next day.

It may seem inconsistent with his anxiety to avoid all occasions of war that, five months later (January 28, 1791), he should be proposing and carrying measures for issuing ammunition to the National Guard, speeding up the manufacture of munitions, and prohibiting the export of war material. But this was for defence, not attack, and for the home front in Paris, not for the war on the frontiers. His apparent militarism sprang from the same source as his real anti-militarism—suspicion of the king's ministers, and of the royalist party, whom he believed to be intriguing to end the Revolution by plunging the country into war. Looking back, it is instructive to see how true he had kept, through-

¹v. the satirical *Lettre de M. l'abbé Maury à M. de Robespierre* (Brit. Mus. F. 851 (19)).

out the year, to this line of policy. His enemies denounced him as a defeatist, and even his supporters regarded him as somewhat of an alarmist. At the time it might seem that they were right. But before 1791 was out, the country was on fire with militarism, and not only the king, but also the ruling party in the Assembly, was deliberately courting war as a means of political power. Never was Robespierre's prophetic insight into the national mind better vindicated.

XI

From this survey of Robespierre's parliamentary course during nearly two years, it should be possible to estimate what he had accomplished, and what he had failed to do.

He was almost always in opposition to the middle-class interests of the majority of the House; yet, by his persistence, and by his uncompromising stand for Liberal principles, he gradually secured its respect, turning a minority of one into a small group, and carrying the Assembly with him, not only in the less controversial details of legal or agricultural reform, but also in big political and moral issues. There is abundant evidence from his enemies as well as from his friends that he had made himself one of the two or three most formidable spokesmen in the House, and figures in the country.¹ But the most heaven-born orator could hardly make two speeches a week to the same audience for eighteen months on end without sometimes boring or offending them. Robespierre's presence was unimpressive, his voice harsh, his manner provocative, his evident determination to be heard on every possible occasion a cause of antagonism. He was too often interrupted by 'murmurs', or called to order, he was the central figure of too many unruly incidents, for one to suppose that the House was always pleased to hear 'this tribune of the people'.²

The main cause of offence, indeed, was what Robespierre

¹e.g. quotations from the royalist *Actes des Apôtres* in Croker, 313.

²M. Robespierre a paru à le tribune; mais, l'assemblée ayant témoigné quelque impatience, l'honorable membre s'est retiré, comme Jérémie, la larme à l'œil. (Duplain's *Courrier*, October 3, 1790, R.F. 58/507.)

said, rather than his way of saying it. His uncompromising stand for liberty and equality was hardly more disliked by those who had never accepted the first principles of the Revolution than by those who had begun to forget them. Few things are more annoying to a statesman who is doing his best to govern the country than to be told, by those who have none of his responsibilities, that he is compromising his political principles. He knows that it is half true; but he feels that, in face of what he is doing, it is relatively unimportant. The remedy suggested by English experience is to make criticism responsible by occasionally putting the critics into power. But that remedy was impossible in a single sovereign body of over a thousand members, all of whom were at once members of the Government and of the Opposition, at once responsible rulers and irresponsible critics. Robespierre could not be blamed for playing the part, to which the system confined him, of an uneasy and sometimes accusing conscience. His fellow-members had no remedy but to stop their ears, or to shout him down.

The situation might have been borne good-humouredly, if the happy and confident temper of 1789 had still prevailed. But it did not. 'You can have no idea,' writes Robespierre to his old friend Buissart, 'of the number and difficulty of the questions with which we have to deal. The patriotic deputies of the National Assembly attempted a superhuman task when they undertook to cleanse the Augean stables of the old regime.'¹ 'The Constitutional Committee,' writes Augustin, in October, 'ought to be called the anti-revolutionary Committee; it causes so much anxiety, and is so constantly attacking the patriots.'² 'Paris', he says again, in December, 'shows the worst symptoms of a terrible commotion. Thousands of pamphlets appear every day. . . . There is a crowd of spies in every quarter of the city, and murderers are marked off to assassinate patriots'.³ Robespierre himself speaks of 'the calumnies by which he is plagued', and of the 'hatred of the aristocrats'. He dare not

¹Corresp. 26 (March 4).

³Corresp. 51 (December 13).

²Corresp. 49 (October 17).

write directly to his brother at Arras, lest the name 'Robespierre' on the envelope should incite his enemies to violate the privacy of the post.¹ Augustin, for his part, fears, from Maximilien's silence, that he may have been proscribed, and cannot dissemble his dread lest his 'dear brother' may be fated to 'seal with his blood the cause of the people'.² For 'the capital crawls with discontent, and the Assembly is full of Ministry men, black reactionaries (*noirs*) and blockheads', whilst 'the proceedings of the House are nowadays so indecent and disorderly that it is impossible to take part in them'.³

Even so, the undoubted change in the temper of the Assembly, and the sharpening of the conflict between 'patriots' and 'aristocrats,' might have been faced more philosophically, if the deputies had allowed themselves any relaxation. But the House was now meeting twice a day, Sundays included; there was a crowd of committees in constant session; and four nights in the week the Jacobin Club pre-debated or re-debated the same questions. The crowds round the Manège, the clamour of the news-vendors, and the noisy controversies which overflowed from the Assembly into the cafés and clubs, added to the wear and tear of political nerves. In a society which had few outdoor recreations, and knew little about personal hygiene, there were no physical reserves to aid mental strain, and ill-temper was aggravated by ill-health.

Robespierre himself was overwhelmed with work. Besides his daily attendances at the House (where for a time he held one of the secretaryships),⁴ and the Constitutional Committee, and the long hours he spent at his desk, composing and correcting his speeches, he had accepted, in October, a judgeship at Versailles,⁵ and was a regular attendant at the Jacobins, where for the first fortnight of April he was President. The functions of this last post, alone, were troublesome enough, he told Buissart, without

¹Corresp. 26, 27, 30.

²Corresp. 47 (September, 1790).

³He was elected, with two others, on June 19, 1790.

⁵Corresp. 49, 54.

²Corresp. 40 (June, 1790).

his other occupations.¹ There were also public functions of various kinds in which, as a deputy, he had to take part. We hear of him, for instance, from an independent source, as present at the Fête of Federation on July 14, 1790. 'I was standing behind His Majesty's seat,' says Saint-Priest, 'and almost cheek by jowl with that famous rascal Robespierre'.²

Meanwhile his private correspondence was increasing side by side with his public engagements. Not much of it has survived: but, as against seven extant letters for 1789, of which four are written by himself, we have, in 1790, thirty-three, of which sixteen are his own. They deal partly with controversies already described, such as the accusations of Lambert, or the libels of Beaumetz³; and partly with legal problems,⁴ or the interpretation of decrees.⁵ There were replies to be written to patriotic societies at Chalons, Arras, Avignon, or Marseille.⁶ There were admirers who could not be offended, and editors who had to be put right.⁷ There was even a correspondent from England.⁸ And always, in the background, were the Arras friends and relations—the Buissarts, brother Augustin, and sister Charlotte. Robespierre, indeed, shrank from letter-writing, and put it off as long as he could: nor was there much provision for it at his overcrowded desk.⁹ But it was a duty, and somehow it was done.

XII

In No. 28 of his *Révolutions de France et de Brabant*, Desmoulins described the scene of May 22 in the Tuileries gardens following the debate on the right of declaring war,¹⁰ when the little Dauphin had been seen clapping his hands at the palace window, and went on to put a speech into Robespierre's mouth: 'Why! Gentlemen,' he said to the crowd which surrounded him, and deafened him with its

¹Corresp. 26, 27.

²*Mémoires*, 2/37.

³v. 1/82.

⁴Corresp. 23.

⁵Corresp. 24, 25, 42.

⁶Corresp. 28, 43, 53, 54.

⁷Corresp. 46, 41.

⁸Corresp. 48.

⁹*Je trouve en ce moment des plumes, de l'encre, du papier, croyez que ce n'est pas chose facile sur le bureau de mon frère.* (Augustin to Buissart, received September 9, 1790. Corresp. 47.)

¹⁰v. 1/101.

cheers, 'upon what are you congratulating yourselves? The decree is a bad one—as bad as it can be. Let that brat at the window clap his hands if he will: he knows what he is doing better than we do'. The moment he read this passage, Robespierre wrote to Desmoulins, declaring that he had said nothing of the kind, and that he would never have used in public the frankness (*franchise*; Desmoulins had called him *franc*) which he thought suitable in the Assembly. Desmoulins' reply was a good piece of journalistic impudence. He printed the protest in his next issue, and added this editorial note: 'If I insert this *errata* (*sic*), my dear Robespierre, it is solely to flaunt your signature before my fellow-journalists, and to give them a hint not to mutilate in future a name rendered famous by the patriotism of its bearer. There is a dignity about your letter, and a senatorial weightiness, which rather hurts me, as an old College friend. You are proud, and you have a right to be, to wear the toga of the National Assembly. I like this noble conceit, and I am only sorry that all the deputies are not as conscious of their dignity as you are. But you might at least have given an old comrade like myself something more than a nod of the head—not that I love you any the less for it; because you *are* faithful to your principles, however it may be with your friends. All the same, why this insistence on my recantation? I may have slightly altered the facts, in the story I told; but it was all to your credit; and if you never actually used the words I put in your mouth, still they certainly express your thoughts. Instead of disavowing my journalism in such dry terms, you might have contented yourself with saying, like Cousine in that charming play, *Le Mort supposé*, "Ah! Sir, you are embroidering!" You are not one of those poor creatures described by J. J. Rousseau, who hate to have their thoughts repeated, and who say what they really think before their butler or their valet, but never in the National Assembly, or the Tuileries gardens.'¹

It cannot be supposed that the jealousy, or the resentment

¹Corresp. 41.

with Robespierre's pride of office, which look out between the lines of this characteristically spiteful note, were peculiar to his old school-fellow. Evidently he was not popular in the House. In view of this letter, it is certainly to Robespierre's credit that he took an opportunity, two months later, to defend Desmoulins from the anger of the Assembly, and that he was present as a witness at his marriage.¹

Two letters apparently owe their preservation to the fact that they were put in as evidence during trials under the Terror. Charles Michaud was a country priest, who wrote to his friend Robespierre asking what the rights of the municipality were over the parish church: it could order the removal of the squire's pew; but could it demand accounts from the person responsible for the upkeep of the fabric? Robespierre's reply was part of Michaud's *dossier* when he was brought before the revolutionary tribunal set up by the terrorist Lebon at Arras, four years later, and helped, no doubt, innocent as it was, to send him to the guillotine.² On the other hand, when Duvignau, a Bordeaux patriot whose zeal outran his discretion, was indicted as a Girondist, he was able to produce a letter from Robespierre thanking him for the gift of a pamphlet, and it saved his life.³

Robespierre in 1790 was not so inured to flattery as he became in 1794. He can therefore be excused for treasuring a letter which went far to compensate for the sneers of Desmoulins, and the libels of Beaumetz. It was dated '*Blérancourt près Noyon, le 19 août,*' and began:—'You, who uphold our tottering country against the torrent of despotism and intrigue, you whom I know, as I know God, only through his miracles—it is to you, Monsieur, that I address myself.' The request that followed was no more than that Robespierre should interest himself in a petition from a small local town. But the letter ended with more words of

¹Blanc, 5/150, Clarétie, 149 f., Hamel, 1/351. The first accepts, the second bowdlerizes, and the third indignantly rejects the story that when Bérardier's address moved Desmoulins to tears, Robespierre sneered *Ne pleure donc pas, hypocrite*.

²Corresp. 42. He was executed on April 17, 1794.

³Corresp. 46; A.R. 5/325.

comfort. 'I do not know you,' the writer said; 'but you are a great man. You are not merely the deputy of a province; you are the deputy of the Republic, and of mankind'. The signature to this effusion—'*Saint-Just, électeur au département de l'Aisne*'—meant nothing to Robespierre; but it was the beginning of a strange man and boy affection, from which Robespierre derived new ardour and ideas for his work, and which was, perhaps, the sincerest that he ever felt.¹

There remains the Arras postbag. Eighteen out of the thirty-three letters belonging to 1790 were written to or from Robespierre's native town. After the long silence for which he apologized to Buissart in November, 1789,² Robespierre seems to have made a resolution to send a report to his constituency at the beginning of every month: there are letters dated March 4, April 1, and May 1, written to Buissart as *commissaire* for the Artois deputies.³ But then either his resolution failed, or the letters have been lost; for there is nothing more, except a formal letter of thanks for a vote of confidence, addressed to the Arras club. For the story of local events, and its bearing on Maximilien's career, we have to fall back on Augustin's readier pen, and on a single letter from Charlotte Robespierre. The latter writes on April 9 (it is evidently the chance relic of a series of letters) reporting attempts to deal with the terrible state of unemployment and destitution among the Arras poor, and saying that she has fallen out with her brother's old benefactor, Mme Marchand, now the editress of a royalist paper.⁴ It was from this letter also, and from an enclosure by Augustin, that Maximilien learnt of the financial difficulties of the home at Arras, and of the desire of his brother and sister to come to Paris. Augustin is organizing a Jacobin club at Arras, and takes the opportunity of his brother's presidency of the Paris Jacobins to ask for affiliation to the mother-society.⁵ He is also concerned with the

¹Corresp. 45.

²v. 1/73.

³Corresp. 35.

⁴Corresp. 29. We know from other sources of the distress at Arras. An appeal to the Assembly by the Mayor, Dubois de Fosseux, says that there are 8,000 paupers, out of a population of 20,000, dependent on local charity (Brit. Mus. R. 232).

⁵Corresp. 32.

counter-revolutionary propaganda carried on by the religious houses in and about Arras, and with the disposal of the revenues of Saint-Vaast, which he thinks would be better applied to the relief of the poor than to the foundation of further endowments for education, such as he and his brother had both enjoyed. He is engagingly anxious for Maximilien's safety; the 'monstrous behaviour' of his enemies 'makes his blood boil, and the villains had better keep out of his way'.¹ When he has at last induced Robespierre to pay his fare to Paris, and to find him rooms in the rue Jacques,² he writes to Buissart the monthly reports that his brother is too busy to keep up, and seals them with the *cachet* of the Assembly.³ We hear more, in these letters, about Buissart than about Robespierre—his ambition to be a *juge de paix*, the memoir on weights and measures he has presented to the Assembly, or his wife and children (*marmots si gentils*); much also about Augustin's efforts to find a job, and his hopes that the new *garde des sceaux* may give him a commissionership, or the Arras electors nominate him to the local Court of Appeal. But nothing comes of it. He stays on in Paris hoping against hope for some permanent occupation; and he is still there in March, 1791.⁴

The correspondence for the year ends with three letters to the *administrateurs* of Avignon. They had sent Robespierre a vote of thanks for his part in securing their political freedom, and an expression of their desire to be not only free, but also French. He replied in terms which show that, whatever his personal disappointments, he had not lost faith in the Revolution. 'Yes, Gentlemen,' he writes, 'you shall be French: indeed, your wish, and the wish of the French people, makes you so already. France covets no new territory, but free and virtuous citizens. And what country can offer them so well as yours? If Rome gave the right of citizenship to the peoples she had conquered, why should

¹Corresp. 32, 34, 39.

²About two miles from the rue Saintonge.

³Corresp. 47.

⁴Villiers, who no doubt resented his sponging on Maximilien, calls him *miserable avocasseur, sans moyens, faux, ivrogne, bas, et crapuleux*.

THE CHAMPION OF LIBERTY

we refuse it to our brothers, our fellow-conquerors of despotism, who design to fight by our side for the preservation of our common liberty? That is the sole policy which can make men happy. That is my profession of faith.¹

¹Corresp. 53. Full text and two other letters in A.H. 3/583, 7/269.

CHAPTER V

THE SUCCESSOR OF MIRABEAU (JANUARY-JUNE, 1791)

I

AN anti-Jacobin pamphlet of 1790 describes ironically the pleasures and privileges of the common people—how they can frequent the Opéra, the Comédie, and above all the Palais Royal, where proud Jacobins point out to them the heroes of the day: 'There goes a deputy. . . . Yes, that is King Mirabeau; and that King Barnave; and that King Robespierre.' Such is the evidence of Robespierre's enemies, who had never ceased to caricature his person and speeches in the royalist press,¹ that he had, by the end of 1790, reached an eminence that would have seemed fantastic to the provincial lawyer of 1789. He faced what the new year might bring with fresh confidence in his powers; and he might well do so; for his success had been won by factors within his own control—persistent self-improvement, and unswerving support of a cause. He had no facile ability to make him careless, no charms that might cease to attract, no sense of humour to suggest a doubt as to his own importance. What could stop his career, unless it were a success that left him nothing to fight for, or the enmity of those who were bored with his incessant uprightness? 'He was the sworn foe (said Dubois-Crancé) of every kind of oppression, the fearless champion of the rights of the people. He only needed a fine presence, a voice like Danton's, and sometimes a little less presumption and pig-headedness; for these small failings often did harm to the cause he was defending. He was a proud and jealous man, but fair and upright. His bitterest critics could never accuse him of irregular conduct. His principles were austere to a fault, and

¹e.g. *Sermon prononcé au club des Jacobins . . . par Dom Prospère—Isარიote—Honeste Robespierre de Bonne-Foi.* (Jac. 2/177.)

he never deviated from them a hair's breadth. Such as he had been from the beginning of his career, such he was to the end of it; and there are mighty few men to whom such praise can be given'.¹ 'He is a living commentary,' wrote Desmoulins, 'on the Declaration of Rights, and the personification of good sense'. But he does not blink the fact that Robespierre's opinions were too advanced for the majority of the House, and even applies to him the text, 'I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now'.² On the other hand, if Robespierre had spoken less frequently, he might have carried more weight. Members noticed with resentment that he sat as close as he could to the *bureau*, so as to lose no opportunity of occupying the tribune. The Moderates of the Assembly came to calling him their Maury (after the intransigent Royalist), and welcomed his opposition, because it won them votes. Indeed, it was not in the National Assembly, but in the Jacobin Club, with its more varied and enthusiastic audience, that Robespierre was most thoroughly at home.³

II

Little has been said about the Jacobin Club hitherto, because the records of its proceedings during 1789 and 1790 are very scanty. But from February, 1791, they become much fuller, and its debates begin to rival those of the Assembly itself in importance.

Whilst English clubs in the later part of the eighteenth century remained primarily social, French clubs, partly influenced by them, and partly developing independently out of the earlier social and literary *salons*, took a turn towards politics and social reform. It was thus natural that the opening of the States-General in 1789 should lead to the formation of clubs for deputies. The Breton members, who were already in the habit of meeting, before they came to Versailles, were urged to carry on the practice there, in

¹R.F. 9/704; A.R. 6/255.

²*Révolutions de France et de Brabant*, February 21, 1791.

³A.R. 6/255.

order to concert a common policy. But from their first meeting (April 30), besides an inner circle confined to themselves (*comité bretagne*), they also had an outer circle (*club breton*) in which other deputies might join them, to discuss matters of general interest. The meetings were held at the Café Amaury, in a large room, which some accounts place on the first floor, and others underground.¹ The outer circle included Mirabeau, Sieyès, Barnave, Pétion, Grégoire, the Lameths, and Robespierre. The proceedings were secret, and no minutes were kept, any sign of 'party' being at that time a little suspect. It was customary to discuss the agenda for the Assembly; and parliamentary incidents which seemed to happen spontaneously had sometimes been rehearsed beforehand at the club. Soon after the transference of the Assembly to Paris (October, 1789) the *comité bretagne* re-assembled at the Place des Victoires. By December it was drawing up rules, admitting members who were not deputies, and granting affiliation to provincial societies. Thus an outer circle grew up again, on wider lines than before; and it soon adopted a new name—*Société de la Révolution*—and occupied larger quarters at the Dominican or 'Jacobin' convent in the rue Saint-Honoré. Soon (January, 1790?) the name was changed again to *Société des Amis de la Constitution*; and finally (from September 21, 1792) to *Société des Jacobins, amis de la liberté et de l'Égalité*.²

A three-arched entry from the street led to an open court, in which the conventual buildings—church, cloister, library, and chapter-house—were flanked by secular dwellings. The first meeting-place of the club was the refectory; but its wall-benches and improvised seats soon proved inadequate for the crowd of members, and they gratefully accepted the monks' offer of a lease of the library—a big vaulted room above the church, containing a valuable collection of books

¹The tradition accepted by Aulard is that of the first-floor room; the authority was one Angé, an eye-witness, who claimed to possess the chair occupied by Robespierre. Before the war this building was the Brasserie Muller, at the corner of Avenue Saint-Cloud and rue Carnot; its owner had put up tablets recording its history, and marking the place where Robespierre used to sit. (A.R. 2/382.)

²Aulard, *Études*, 1/4; Jac., *Introd.* to Vol. 1; R.F. 22/107, 36/385; some details are not yet certain.

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and oriental MSS., and bearing on its walls portraits of distinguished members of the Order. Here seats were arranged in four rows down each side of the room; but these too became over-crowded; and in May, 1791, a final move was made into the church itself, whose huge vaulted nave, choir, and side-chapels, with their mediæval pictures, statues, tombs, and coloured glass, provided an ample if incongruous setting for the political debates of a new dispensation.¹

The rules of the club show that it was meant to be a non-party society, with branches all over the country, for defending and promoting the principles of the constitutional revolution, and for discussing beforehand the agenda for the Assembly. Members could be nominated, if *députés* or *suppléants*, by two members; if not, by five. They could be censured, or expelled, for opinions contrary to those of the club, or for absence, without good cause, for more than a month. The officers were a President, a Treasurer, and four Secretaries; the President and Secretaries were generally changed every month. Meetings were held every evening at six when the Assembly was not sitting, and at least three days a week when it was. No subscription is mentioned in the rules, only voluntary contributions; but Louis Blanc is probably following a good oral tradition when he says that there was an entry fee of twelve *livres*, and a subscription of twenty-four *livres*, paid quarterly.² The admission of the general public was not properly regulated till October, 1791, when the choir and organ galleries were fitted with seats. It is said that on great occasions room was found for as many as 2,000 spectators. The list of members printed in December, 1790, contains 1,102 names; but both the number of members, and that of affiliated societies, varied greatly from time to time, according to the political situation. Generally speaking, the sentiments of the club were

¹For picturesque descriptions of club meetings, v. Michelet, Lewes, Belloc. The introductions of busts of Mirabeau, Helvétius, and other 'saints' of the Revolution (cp. 1/294) can only have emphasized this oddness.

²This is corroborated by the accounts published by Desfieux, the Club Treasurer, in 1791 (A.R. 7/37).

those of the majority in the Assembly; whilst the size of its subscription, and the method of election, excluded all but deputies, or well-to-do citizens of the middle class.¹

III

During the first six months of 1791 the debates in the Assembly may seem to be marking time; many of their topics are already familiar, and the speakers on both sides have come to know one another's points of view so well that there is an air of unreality about their arguments, and even about their abuse. But the biographer of Robespierre cannot pass over this period, for it is that in which the deputy from Arras definitely challenges the supremacy of Mirabeau, and becomes, after his death, the most influential orator in the House.

Robespierre's first intervention in public business, after a silence of three weeks, was to defend, as he had done before, the privacy of the post (February 28).² His second was to oppose his old enemy Le Chapelier's bill for treating disrespect to public officials as *lèse-nation*, and thus, in effect, setting up the principle of *droit administratif*. Such proposals seemed to him an attack upon liberty, and an invitation to judicial tyranny. He was almost English in his suspicion of officialism, and in his belief in the value of public criticism. His third intervention, later in the same day, was in the matter of the *émigrés*. The stream of aristocratic emigration, which had flowed since July, 1789, leaving suspicion and unemployment behind it, had lately been swollen by the flight of the king's aunts: and there were rumours that Louis himself was planning to follow them. On this very day a Parisian mob had set out to demolish the *donjon* of Vincennes, and Lafayette, at the Tuileries, had disarmed a crowd of nobles who were suspected of covering a royal flight. That Robespierre took the incident of the *Chevaliers du poignard* seriously, and had, indeed, in some sense predicted it, may be inferred from the language in which it is

¹Barnave's *Règlement*, February 8, 1790.

²cp. I/55, 83.

described by his brother in a letter to Buissart soon afterwards.¹ But when Le Chapelier, for the Constitutional Committee, introduced a bill for preventive measures against emigration, the principle of liberty once more overruled the feelings of the moment; and he made a speech which, whilst it offended the 'thirty voices'—Duport, Lameth, Barnave, d'Aiguillon, and their friends—silenced by Mirabeau on this occasion, won the approval of the '1789 Club' and of the Moderate press.² The same scrupulousness prevented Robespierre from supporting a measure proposed by Desmeuniers a few days later (March 3), which might have seemed the answer to his difficulties of February 28. Government control over local administration was to be secured by setting up a hierarchy of district and departmental authorities, subordinated to the Ministers. Such an organization might have obviated much of the administrative anarchy of the next few years, and ante-dated the Napoleonic centralization. But in Robespierre's mind it contained a threat to popular liberty which no plea of mere efficiency could justify. The smallest electoral body (*assemblée primaire*) seemed to him invested with a fragment of the national sovereignty, and therefore answerable to no lower authority than a National Assembly. The compromise finally arrived at had important consequences; for the Revolution was likely to stand or fall, in the long run, less by the actions of the Parisian government than by the reactions of the provinces.

The same evening—for by now, owing to the pressure of business, the Assembly was meeting twice a day—the abbé Gouttes, in the name of the Finance Committee, brought forward a scheme for a National Lottery (*tontine*), out of the proceeds of which it was hoped not only to provide Old Age Pensions, but also to form a Sinking Fund for the extinction of the National Debt. This respectable gamble had the support, both of the *Académie de Sciences*, and of Mirabeau, whose secretary Clavière had a place on the

¹ *Mon frère avoit prédit cette horrible manœuvre* (Corresp. 62).

² The *Moniteur* gives a very short summary of the speech, and fails to keep its promise of *la suite demain*.

Board of Directors, and who proposed to launch the scheme by impounding five days' stipend from every deputy. This was well enough for those who could afford it; but to poor men like Robespierre, who barely lived upon their eighteen *livres* a day, it would be a heavy sacrifice. He therefore attacked and defeated the proposal, on the double ground that lotteries were undesirable, and that the payment of deputies was a security against government by the rich.

Two days later (March 5) his clear-headedness again saved the House from a dubious commitment. The Austrian government had asked for the extradition of two men accused of forging drafts on the bank of Vienna, and the Diplomatic Committee proposed to grant the request out of hand. He urged and secured delay. 'We must be certain,' he said, 'as to what are the actual rights and duties of nations in such matters'.

He was less successful, soon afterwards (March 9), in an attack upon one of the last hiding-places of royal power. It was proposed that the *administrateurs du trésor public* should be appointed by the king. But the Treasury, he urged, almost in the words he had used in the debate on taxation eighteen months before,¹ belongs to the people, of whose contributions it is composed: it is for them, therefore, to appoint the Treasurers. For his almost solitary stand in this matter Robespierre received the rather embarrassing congratulations of a social lion-hunter, Mme de Chalabre, and an invitation to dinner.²

There remain two episodes which enlisted all Robespierre's sympathies—his belief in the people, his respect for the patriot clergy, his hatred of judicial oppression, and his resentment at departmental interference with local liberty.

Issy l'Évêque was a small village near Autun. In the early days of the Revolution, under the leadership of its curé, one Carion, the villagers had organized a permanent committee, a volunteer force, and a common stock of grain. The curé himself was chairman of the committee, commandant of the militia, and supervisor of the granary—'Danton

¹August 26, 1789.

²Corresp. 61, cp. 2/216.

in a cassock' was Desmoulins' name for him.¹ When some of the farmers complained of this regime, the magistrates of the *bailliage* arrested Carion, and sent him before the Châtelet at Paris, under a charge of *lèse-nation*. This discredited court, by way of a last gesture, threw him into prison; and he had been there seven months before the Assembly at last intervened. Robespierre, following Merle, urged that all charges should be dropped, and the curé released. The House agreed. The judicial proceedings were quashed, and Carion set free—another victory for the people.

Two days later there came up a second case involving the food shortage in the provinces, and a charge against the clergy. Two lives had been lost in a food-riot at Douai. Alquier, presenting a Report, moved to censure the municipality, and to threaten the local clergy with penalties for incitement to revolt. Douai was not far from Arras: Maximilien's brother had been at school there, and he knew the local conditions well. He protested against both parts of the proposal. But the Assembly was determined to make an example, and threw the municipal officers into prison. The only part of Robespierre's speech which succeeded was his plea for the clergy; and that won him less applause from his friends than from his enemies. Twice within three days he had championed this increasingly unpopular cause. Such indiscretion might well become, in later years, the basis for a charge of clericalism.

It was Alquier, again, who reported (April 2) on the troubles at Nîmes. This time Robespierre only expressed the hope that care would be taken to discriminate the innocent from the guilty.

IV

At eight o'clock the next morning (April 3) an event happened which was to change the course of the Revolution, and Robespierre's career. Mirabeau was dead. Robes-

¹Jac. 2/144.

pierre had long outgrown, if not his doubt of the man's honesty, at least his disbelief in his powers. Sometimes during the last two years they had championed the same cause; more often they had been on opposite sides. But they had always respected one another as good fighters; the younger man had copied and courted the elder;¹ and the elder had been generous enough to express his praise. Now—he could do no less—Robespierre repaid part of his debt, by speaking (April 3) of 'that illustrious man, who, at the most critical times of the Revolution, showed so courageous a front against despotism', and by supporting 'with all his power, or rather, with all the feelings of his heart', the proposal for a public funeral. He also favoured the suggestion that the newly-built church of Saint-Généviève should be used as a burial-place for great Frenchmen, and that the first to be interred there should be Mirabeau; and a measure to this effect was hurried through the House.

What were Robespierre's thoughts, as he walked with his fellow-deputies behind the star-studded trappings and the figure of Fame that adorned Mirabeau's funeral car? Did he know that he was burying not only Mirabeau, but also the Monarchy²—the last chance of saving the French throne? Hardly: for Mirabeau's relations with the court were as yet guessed rather than known; royalism still had a firm hold on the country; the monarchical party might even be gaining ground in the House; and the very fears expressed lest the king might be planning flight showed how essential his presence was thought to be for the success of the Revolution. No; but at least the king's cause was weaker for the loss of its chief champion. And what a change it would be in the House—that great voice and presence gone, that vast store of political knowledge closed! Who could take Mirabeau's place? Malouet wrote afterwards, and may have said at the time, that there were only two men on the Left of the Assembly who were not

¹Le Blond (101) says that Robespierre sat at Mirabeau's side in the Assembly, followed him in the streets, and even copied his *coiffure*; so that the papers dubbed him *le singe de Mirabeau*.

²*le deuil de la Monarchie*, Mirabeau's supposed words on his deathbed.

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demagogues, only two who followed their own line of conduct, irrespective of public opinion—Mirabeau and Robespierre. The death of the first left the position of the second unique. It would have needed a man much less interested in himself than Robespierre not to be conscious of this opportunity, one much less ambitious not to use it for his career. Political vistas opened up behind the coffin of Mirabeau. Where Elijah had failed, Elisha would succeed. The king's cause had really been hopeless from the beginning: the cause of the People could not fail, if it were pursued to the end. Mirabeau's advocacy had been ruined by his full-blooded amorality: no such reproach should ever be brought against the untiring correctness of Robespierre's thin-lipped soul. He would take the other's place as the spokesman of the Assembly, the instructor of the nation, the saviour of France. And the People—the people which 'in its revolutionary consciousness, wider than all parties and all feuds, reconciled all the forces of the Revolution', and in its Popular Societies 'set side by side the bust of Robespierre the Incorruptible and the bust of Mirabeau accused of corruption',¹ would range itself under a leader, whom it had already come to recognize as the one consistent and outspoken champion of its cause.

V

Robespierre's speeches after April 3 show a new confidence, and a broader style, befitting his emancipation, and the larger canvas that the national interests now demand.

He could not have had a better occasion to open a new stage in his parliamentary career than the debate on testamentary law which took place on April 5. It was a lawyer's subject, and it enabled him to appear as the pupil and defender of his great predecessor. For one of the last acts of Mirabeau's life had been to prepare a speech for this debate;

¹Jaurès 2/344. It is at this point, too, and with the same feeling, that Louis Blanc gives his full-length portrait of Robespierre (5/269)—'that frozen embodiment of principle', that 'reflective but marble statue of justice', whose feelings are all in his head: 'put your hand on his heart, and there is not a stir of life in it'.

and, at his own request, Talleyrand read it to the House. So delivered, the discourse seemed less an argument than an act of homage, and Robespierre had an easy task in showing that its proposals were an appropriate extension of the sacred principle of equality from persons to property.

But he added something of his own, and something significant, when he said that equality of succession is not only a law of nature, but also a means of diminishing wealth, which is an enemy of virtue;¹ for this idea is the clue to anything in Robespierre's creed which can be called socialistic. It is clear that he cannot have meant quite what we mean either by 'nature', or by 'virtue'. Indeed, to a Frenchman of 1791 almost everything was 'natural' which was opposed to the old regime, and hardly anything 'virtuous' which did not glorify the Revolution: in a word, 'natural' meant 'rational', and 'virtuous' 'patriotic'. Robespierre had in mind something like the definition with which Montesquieu prefaces his *L'Esprit des Lois*: 'what I call *vertu* in the republic is love of one's country, that is to say, love of equality. It is not a moral or a Christian virtue, but a political one; and it is as much the main-spring of republican government as reputation (*honneur*) is the main-spring of monarchies.'² He knew from experience the way in which men of wealth—not merely the old aristocratic landlords, but also the new middle-class plutocrats—were, for various selfish reasons of their own, opposing the advance of the Revolution. He believed that real patriotism was to be found among the poor, just because they were poor. Accordingly his 'order of nature' was the sovereignty of the common people; and his 'rule of virtue' the patriotic conduct of the poor—of those who had no interests opposed to the common weal. This way of looking at things, of course, prevented his being a socialist, in the sense of one who wishes to abolish poverty, or a communist, in the sense of one who wishes to abolish patriotism. He would only

¹ *Avec les grandes richesses, la vertu est en borreur.*

² *Avertissement*, prefixed to *Livre I*. Robespierre would certainly have disagreed with Voltaire's historical argument against the *vertu* of democracies (*Lettre à M. de Chevalier de R. . . X*, September 20, 1760).

redistribute wealth so far as it could be done without making the rich so poor that they could no longer be taxed, or the poor so rich that they were no longer patriotic.

VI

On April 6 began the great series of constitutional debates which characterizes this period, and Robespierre made his critical attitude clear at once by opposing the king's right to appoint ministers. He went on to insist that it was the right (*droit*) of the nation to object to bad ministers, and the duty (*devoir*) of the Assembly to demand their dismissal. Next day he opened the resumed debate with a drastic proposal. Eighteen months before, a memorable resolution, aimed partly at Mirabeau, had prevented any deputy from holding office under the crown. Mirabeau was now dead; but Robespierre believed the principle to be so important that he proposed to prolong the disqualification for four years after the dissolution of the Assembly. D'André showed the inner meaning of this suggestion when he urged that deputies should undertake never to solicit places for their friends or relations. The issue was, in fact, more than constitutional. The proposal was not merely another concession to the doubtful principle of the 'division of powers': it was also a blow struck for political purity. The poverty of many of the deputies had made the readiness with which bribes were offered and taken, and the extent to which places and emoluments were solicited by those who hoped to make a living out of the Revolution, a public scandal. Robespierre's motion was an instalment of that gospel of virtue which he already had in mind, and of which he afterwards became the apostle and martyr. He had made a similar suggestion, not long before, in the case of judges of appeal: he was soon to carry the same principle further in the 'self-denying ordinance' of May 16. The fact that the present proposal was accepted by the House was a tribute not only to its honesty, but also to his gift of leadership.

The debate went on for more than a week, and hardly a

day passed without a speech from Robespierre. He would have ex-ministers legally answerable for their actions more than three years after giving up office (April 18), and joined Buzot in trying to strengthen the machinery for calling them to account (April 10). He agreed that the allocation of functions among ministers might be left to the king; but attacked the proposal that the Minister of Justice should be empowered to supervise the judges in their application of the law, or to call them to account; for the law is its own interpreter, and the judges, representing the people, can be called to account only by the Public Prosecutor (April 9, 11). He moved to reduce the stipends and pensions of ministers, and to deprive them of the disposal of the police (*gendarmerie*—April 11, 13). So persistent were his attacks on the powers of ministers that his old enemy Beaumetz accused him of federalism. 'This systematic refusal,' he said, 'to give the government any control, however indirect, over the armed forces, is federal in principle (*un système fédératif*), and tends to destroy the unity of monarchical government (*l'unité monarchique*)'. Robespierre's friends indignantly denied the charge: but there was this much truth in it, that the extreme decentralization into which, in its reaction against the old regime, provincial administration was being allowed to lapse, did afford a foothold for risings against the central government. Lyon, Toulon, and the Vendée were very soon to prove that Beaumetz's fears were not ill-founded. But the irony of the charge was that those who accused Robespierre were, before long, to take advantage of this very system, and to fall under the charge of *fédéralisme*, whilst he was to be the organizer of a centralized regime expressly designed to defeat it. When and why Robespierre changed his mind, it remains to discover. At present, in the spring of 1791, he is still reacting against the old monarchical system. At the British Embassy, at this time, 'Robespierre, Pethion, Buzot, and Prieur' were regarded as the leaders of 'a sett of men whose object is the total annihilation of monarchy, however limited'.¹

¹Gower's despatch of April 15.

VII

Hardly was the debate on ministers ended, when an incident occurred which went far to justify Robespierre's suspicions. Nine months before, the Foreign Minister had roused a storm by allowing Austrian troops to pass through French territory.¹ Now came a report of a concentration of Austrian forces on the eastern frontier. Robespierre, suddenly discovering that a democratic committee might be just as inefficient as a royal minister, threatened to move for the dismissal of the members of the Diplomatic Committee, whose business it was (Pétion asserted) to watch the movements of foreign powers.

Another reminder of the impossibility of isolating the Revolution was afforded by the recurrent problem of Avignon. Since the debate of November 18, nothing had been done towards that *réunion* which seemed to be the only solution of local disorder. Menou's collection of historical documents was not yet complete. The Diplomatic Committee was still considering its report. More serious, the Avignon question was hopelessly entangled with the church settlement. Under the Civil Constitution of the Clergy the Assembly had imposed a form of oath² which had two unhappy results: it split the clergy into two bodies—those who were prepared to take the oath, and those who were not; and it determined the Pope to abandon his neutral attitude, and to anathematize the Revolution.³ So long as the Papacy held its hand, it was bad policy to press on the Avignon affair. Now that Pius had declared himself, this motive for moderation no longer existed; and Robespierre expressed the general impatience when (April 21) he demanded that the Committee should present its report as soon as possible. Meanwhile, it would be highly injudicious to accede to the Pope's request for troops to restore order at Avignon (April 28). When the report was at last pre-

¹ July 27, 1790 (v. 1/103).

² Decreed, November 27; accepted by the King, December 28, 1790; enforced, January 2, 1791.

³ Papal Briefs of March 10 and April 13.

sented, on April 30, it was found to contain proposals for the annexation of Avignon, and the payment of compensation to the Papacy. Robespierre spoke three times in the five days' debate which followed, and always in favour of *réunion*; but the House, with a moderation remarkable in face of Papal provocation, decided once more for delay.¹ It was not until more than four months later (September 14), when civil war in the church had become inevitable, and foreign war was imminent upon the frontiers, that Robespierre's solution was accepted.

The interest of the Avignon affair, for a biographer of Robespierre, lies in the evidence it affords of the development of his views on church questions. There is no trace, now, of Papalism, or even of any tenderness towards Catholic scruples. The Pope is merely a secular ruler claiming control over the people of Avignon—a control which nature and reason alike declare to be absurd. The Assembly is warned against the secular evils that may result if Avignon is left in foreign hands; but not against the religious strife which will be caused by a breach with the Papacy. The Pope, no doubt, had already anathematized the Revolution; but the vote of May 4 shows that the quarrel was not yet regarded as irremediable. It follows that Robespierre was now ready, if indeed he had not always been so, to carry the principle of the sovereignty of the people to its logical conclusion in the affairs of the church as well as of the state; and that, though he no more considered himself a Protestant than a Republican, yet he would have no scruples in attacking any prerogative of King or Pope that stood in the way of national self-determination.

Meanwhile, other questions had intervened. On April 23 the king repeated a *démarche* which he had made a year before, and sent assurances to all foreign courts that he was a free agent, sincerely attached to the new Constitution, and to the principles of the Revolution. The Assembly can hardly have known that this declaration was intended to

¹At the Jacobins, the same evening, Robespierre said that, if the vote were not reversed, there would be civil war. (Jac. 2/384.)

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cover the king's plans for flight, which were already far advanced, and which the incident of the attempted journey to Saint-Cloud (April 18) precipitated. But when it was proposed that a solemn vote of thanks should be conveyed to the king, Robespierre, speaking ironically, and perhaps with some prescience of Louis' treachery, said that they should not so much thank the king for any fresh adhesion to revolutionary principles, as congratulate him on the continued accordance of his sentiments with those of the nation. Whether or not the House realized this *double entendre*, it might fairly remember, a month later, the warning that it had received.

VIII

On April 27-8 there took place a long-expected debate on the National Guard. It is a curious illustration of the methods of discussion in the Assembly that Robespierre's speech on this subject should have been written in 1790, sent to the press in January, 1791, and delivered in the House in April.¹ Whatever the advantages of this arrangement for political education, it had serious drawbacks in public business; for the speech was so long (it occupied seventy-eight pages of print) that the deputies resented Robespierre's attempt to speak again; whilst (once published), it was so incapable of modification that the orator could not take advantage of those shades of opinion in the House that might have enabled him to win his case. Indeed, one is inclined to ask, did he wish to win it, or only to publish a democratic manifesto?

To Robespierre, as, indeed, to most of his hearers, the National Guard was the nation in arms. Its origin, as a citizen army evolved spontaneously from the events of July, 1789, and representing the defence of Paris against the threats of the crown, had made it a counter-weight rather than an addition to the royal army; and it must now be organized in such a way that it could neither be used oppressively by the Executive Power, nor offer temptations

¹Corresp. 59.

to some general ambitious to make himself a new tyrant. Accordingly Robespierre suggests various modifications of the usual military establishment and routine. The appointment of officers should be taken out of the king's hands, and their numbers limited. Everything should be done to discourage professional solidarity (*esprit de corps*) among the officers, or in the ranks; there should be no 'crack regiments' (*corps d'élite*), no decorations, no wearing of uniform off parade. If the members of the citizen army want rewards for their services, let them find them in 'the courage and virtue of free men, and the sacred cause for which they were entrusted with arms'. So far, so good. But the crux was still to come. The Constitutional Committee proposed that the Guard should be recruited only from amongst the 'active' citizens. That they should do so was a foregone conclusion; none the less, Robespierre felt bound, on principle, to object. The National Guard, he declared, was the sanction behind the laws and the constitution. If the laws and the constitution are designed in the interests of the whole nation, it is for the nation as a whole to protect and enforce them: if they are not, they are bad laws, and a bad constitution. 'Who, after all,' he cried, 'made our glorious revolution? Was it the rich? Was it the powerful? No, it was the people alone who willed it, and who carried it through; and that is why the people alone can preserve it'. At this, someone remarked that he was identifying 'the people (*peuple*)' with the whole body of citizens. 'And so I do,' replied Robespierre, and went on to claim that it was his opponents who were trying to divide the nation, not himself. But, in fact, this was just the weak point in his argument. In the absence of a French word to describe something that French history scarcely recognized, he had misused an ambiguous term. He might have remembered that when, in the famous debate of July 17, Mirabeau had proposed that the deputies should call themselves '*représentants du peuple français*', eminent lawyers had objected that the word *peuple* was ambiguous: to the deputies of the Commons it might suggest the whole nation (Latin *populus*), whilst the clergy and nobility

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might take it to mean the lower orders (Latin *plebs*). Robespierre shared Mirabeau's difficulty. He was quite honestly trying to combine two points of view—that from which he had seen the whole nation achieving the Revolution, and that from which he was coming to see that a part of the nation—though by far the largest and most patriotic part—would inherit it. Democracy, he held, began with a rising of the whole middle and lower class—nine-tenths of the nation—against an oppressive regime; but it would end in something not unlike the liquidation of privilege, the dispossession of the rich and powerful, and a dictatorship of the proletariat. Holding this view, he could not really use the word *peuple* in the same sense as his opponents. He and they were entirely at cross purposes; and when, later in the day, he tried to move an amendment to the motion, he was shouted down.¹

IX

The refusal of political rights to 'passive' citizens was, by now, the deliberate intention of the Moderates who, more and more, ruled the Assembly and the state. On May 9, Le Chapelier followed up his law prohibiting associations of workmen² with another designed to deprive the already disfranchised class of its only other peaceable means of influencing public opinion—the right of petition. A series of articles was formulated, making the *droit d'affiche*—the right of posting bills in the streets—a monopoly of the government, disallowing any association, such as a political club, to present petitions to the Assembly, and excluding 'passive' citizens from any form of petition whatsoever. But this time the reactionaries had gone too far. Public indignation was aroused;³ and Robespierre won assent to his declaration that 'to present petitions is the

¹It was apparently apropos of this debate that Mme Roland regretted Robespierre's habit of speaking impromptu. (*Correspondance*, ed. Perroud, 2/270.)
²v. 1/91.

³Gouvion, major-general of the National Guard, wrote to Bailly, the Mayor of Paris, stating the extra precautions he had taken to prevent disorder outside the Manège. (Tuetey, 2/4098.)

imprescriptible right of every Frenchman'—a right which they had enjoyed even under despots, as Prussians had under Frederick the Great. God himself, he said, is more merciful than the framers of this bill; 'for he listens to the cry of the unfortunate, and of the sinner'. As a result of this appeal, though the ban on club petitions was not raised, the rights of 'passive' citizens remained untouched, and the *droit d'affiche* was allowed to any citizen who was prepared to put his name to his opinions. The victory was only partial; for another clause of the bill, which Robespierre and Buzot opposed unsuccessfully, gave power to municipalities to control all communal or sectional assemblies. And the real motive of the measure—fear of what the lower orders might do when organized in their sections and societies—remained untouched; for this was, in fact, a form of political action as natural to Frenchmen as parliamentary government is uncongenial. The framers of the bill already foresaw something of the struggle which was so soon to follow between the National Assembly and the Paris Commune. Robespierre himself might have taken warning; for though it was the Jacobin Club which raised him to power in 1792-3, it was his failure to carry the Sections which caused his fall in 1794.

X

This question had hardly been decided when another great debate began, on the French colonial possessions in the West Indies.

It was evident from an early date in the Revolution that the colonial question would raise unusual difficulties. On the one hand, the principles of liberty and equality were of universal application: on the other, how could they be applied to a mixed population of black natives and white settlers, of free men and slaves? Even that would be to understate the difficulties; for there were in the Antilles, at this time, not merely twelve black men to one white, and six slaves to one master, but also three intermediate classes

—*petits blancs*, or white 'beach-combers,' mulattoes, who owned a quarter of the slaves, but who were kept in a state of inferiority by the white settlers; and freed negroes. Nor could the problems of the situation be discussed coolly; for the representatives of the slave system and the white monopoly were already organized in the *Société correspondante des colons français*, or *Club Massiac*; the Moderate reformers controlled the *Comité Colonial*; and the *Amis des noirs*, founded by Brissot, Condorcet, and other Liberals, were working for the immediate abolition of the slave trade, and the ultimate suppression of slavery. Moreover, more than a year before, the Colonial Assemblies, hitherto consisting only of white men, had been thrown open to all land-owners with two years' domicile, and paying taxes, and had been asked to express their views. Thus the question, like that of self-government in India, could not be closed; and the Assembly had either to go back on its rather light-hearted challenge to the vested interests of the white settlers, or to make it good by abolishing slavery, and conferring a constitution.

It is a proof of the reputation Robespierre enjoyed that he should already have been approached by two deputations from the West Indies. On February 1, Leblond and Matheulin, representing Cayenne, asked his support against an instruction of the Colonial Committee which proposed to treat Guiana—a country two months' voyage away, and almost as large as France—as a dependency of Martinique.¹ Two months later (March 31) a deputation from the *ci-devant assemblée de Saint-Marc*, who had been refused a hearing, and thrown into prison, successfully appealed to him to bring their case before the House. It may be inferred that, in his careful way, he was studying the question, and preparing to champion the rights of the native population.

On May 7 the Colonial Committee proposed that it should be left to the *assemblées coloniales* (to which, besides white men, only free mulattoes of the second generation should be admitted) to frame laws for bettering the condi-

¹Corresp. 56.

tion of the *hommes de couleur* and freed negroes (slaves being omitted). In his first speech on this motion, Robespierre pointed out the obvious injustice of a proposal which withdrew a measure of franchise already granted, and allowed white men to legislate for negroes (May 10). In his second he was roused by the manner in which Moreau de Saint-Méri, a champion of the settlers, spoke of the slaves, to use words which, however creditable to his feelings, did little good to himself, or to his cause. 'A single mention of the word "slave" in any of your decrees,' he said, 'is an admission of your dishonour . . . and tantamount to a constitutional decree of slavery. . . . It were better (he went on) to lose every colony we have (*périssent les colonies*) than to sacrifice our happiness, our glory, and our liberty. It were better, I say, to lose every colony, than to yield to the threats of the colonists, and to legislate in their private interests.' It was easy to twist these words, as Brissot did in his Memoirs, into the expression of a desire to get rid of the colonies at all costs. Robespierre's admirers praised his denunciation of slavery, but shook their heads over his indiscretion. That he felt deeply about the subject is shown by the fact that he left the chair, at the Jacobin Club, the same evening, to make a speech attacking Charles Lameth, and then (such at least is the report of the proceedings) used his powers as chairman to prevent him from making a reply.¹

Robespierre's third and last intervention in the debate (May 15) was to protest against any further whittling down of the Rights of Man, of which he regarded himself as the champion. The House finally contented itself with giving mulattoes and freed negroes the same political status as white men, whilst entirely excluding slaves. Even the slave trade went on, with Government support, for another two years.² And so the matter remained, a singular example of the difference between the theory and practice of Freedom,

¹ *Le petit Robespierre qui avait repris la sonnette* (Jac. 2/414). For the whole debate, v. Hardy in A.R. 12/357; Saintoyant, *La colonisation française pendant la Révolution*; Ellicona, *Moreau de Saint-Méry*.

² Government payments for the transport of slaves to the French colonies were abolished on August 16, 1792, but still continued, in respect of contracts made before that date, till August, 1793. (R.F. 54/358.)

until Robespierre's plea for justice was at last heard—in 1848.

The immediate and most important result of this debate, for Robespierre, was that he definitely broke with the 'Triumvirate'—Duport, Barnave, and Charles Lameth; and it was characteristic that he should do so for no personal reasons, but upon what was to him a moral principle.

XI

The following day Robespierre's quixotic temper prompted a gesture whose consequences were more serious than could be realized at the time. The subject for discussion was the *corps législatif* to be set up under the new Constitution; and Thouret had begun to give reasons why members of the old legislature should be eligible for the new, when Maximilien rose to a point of order. It was improper, he said, for deputies to discuss this question, for they could not do so impartially, so long as they were themselves eligible to the next legislature. He therefore proposed that they should here and now declare themselves ineligible. The idea that any member of a parliament should voluntarily exclude himself from re-election, and persuade his fellow-members to do the same, has seemed so extraordinary, that historians have suggested all kinds of ulterior motives for Robespierre's action. It has been said that he knew he would not be re-elected, and wanted company in retirement; or that he was tired of the Assembly, and wished to cover his retreat to the Jacobins; or that he intended to give up speaking for writing, and already saw himself in the editor's chair; or that he knew the post of *accusateur public* was his for the asking,¹ or even (it is his friend Desmoulins' suggestion) that he sacrificed himself, to prevent the re-election of such men as Le Chapelier, Desmeuniers, d'André, or Beaumetz. The answer to all these conjectures lies in Robespierre's speech. He is arguing from his own feelings to what he believes to be those of the whole

¹Augustin Robespierre to Buissart, November 25, 1790 (Corresp. 51).

House. History and conscience (he thinks) both suggest that, when the legislator's work is done, he should retire. Will it be difficult to find another 720 deputies as patriotic as themselves? He does not believe it. Will there be a lack of leaders? The House will be more democratic without them. 'The only leaders we need in a legislative assembly (he declares) are Reason and Truth' (*applause*). As for the retiring members, they will do more good out of the House than in it, by carrying revolutionary principles into every corner of the country.

The effect of these arguments was overwhelming. Robespierre's motion was passed almost unanimously. A royalist deputy demanded the printing, at the public expense, of 'this sublime discourse'. 'The Assembly broke up,' reported the *Moniteur*, 'amid the applause of its own members; and the galleries emptied in silence', as though amazed at the magnanimity of its representatives.¹

They were probably surprised themselves. Although many of them had outgrown the enthusiasm of 1789, and were finding the political atmosphere, like that of the *Manège*, increasingly mephitic; though there were some few who had no hope of re-election, and welcomed Robespierre's motion as a dignified euthanasia; yet there can have been few unaffected by the loss of public position, and of eighteen *livres* a day. What were they thinking of—their wives doubtless put the question, if they did not ask it themselves—to throw up Paris life and a political career for a mere punctilio?

The wider results of this 'Self-denying Ordinance', though serious, were probably not so momentous as is commonly supposed. During the two and a half years of the Constituent Assembly a new generation had grown up, less simple in holding the revolutionary faith, but more experienced in applying it. The embarrassments into which the Legislative Assembly fell were due less to its personnel than to its circumstances; the old members were absent, but the consequences of their acts remained. On the other hand,

¹For a full account of the debate, v. Michon, *Adrien Dupont*, 206.

the benefits which were expected to accrue from the absence of leaders, and the lessening of party strife, were not realized; and the presence of so many ex-deputies in the country, whilst contributing to the political education of the people, also lessened the prestige of the new Assembly, and created rival authorities in the *Commune*, the clubs, and the press. This need not be an unhealthy development in a country that has political experience, and a flexible constitution; but in the France of 1791, fresh from revolution, and experimenting with its first rigid constitution, it was a real danger.

Far from feeling any doubts about the wisdom of its renunciation, the Assembly proceeded, two days later, again under the guidance of Robespierre, to prohibit re-election altogether until after an interval of two years (May 18). This time, after expounding the political dangers of re-election, Maximilien went on to speak more personally than he had done hitherto about the advantages of retirement. Two years of political activity are enough, he thinks, to satisfy any reasonable ambitions. 'When a man has made good use of them, he can return with a good deal of pleasure to the bosom of his family, to meditate on the principles of legislation more deeply than it is possible to do in the bustle of business, and, above all, to recover that taste for equality which is so easily lost in high office'.

XII

This is, perhaps, the place to mention a discourse that Robespierre delivered at the Jacobin Club (May 11) on the congenial subject of the freedom of the press. He had not spoken on Sieyès' Press Law of January 20, the previous year; indeed, it was so badly received, that it never got beyond a first reading: but he may well have been aware that the first act of a really strong government would be to stop the irresponsible criticisms which, at present, could be broadcast by any publisher or pamphleteer.¹ Accordingly,

¹For Sieyès' Law, v. Lav. 1/132; for the failure of all attempts to muzzle the press before August, 1792, v. Tourneux in R.F. 25/193.

as one who is still (but perhaps not long to be) a lover of liberty, he regards complete freedom of speech, both private and public, as the chief safeguard against tyranny. That is to say, there must be no preventive censorship, no prohibitions on an author's desk; but he does not deny that it may be necessary to have a remedial censorship, by way of punishing the writer afterwards for 'incendiary, dangerous, or seditious' sentiments. But, even so, who is to be the judge? Or what certainty is there that the Galileos and the Rousseaus will not be persecuted, and the venal scribblers go untouched? Allow perfect liberty, and (he was simple enough to believe) the press will publish nothing that is not 'as pure and serious and healthy as your revolutionary morals'. On the same principle, 'The only competent judge of personal sentiments, and the only legitimate censor of the press, is public opinion'. Freedom of speech is necessary for the criticism of public officials, and even of the law; and no remedy need be provided but the common law-courts, where complaints will be dealt with, not on any technical definition of libel, but on a general consideration of the character of the litigants.

It has not been sufficiently recognized how far Robespierre's views on this matter diverge from the French tradition, and approximate to the English. True, he believed it essential, as did every Frenchman, to call freedom of speech a Right, and to embody it in a Declaration; but his rejection of any kind of preventive censorship, and his reliance, for redress, upon the ordinary courts, are quite out of the main current of French Press Law, which fills more than 300 pages of Dalloz's *Répertoire* with government enactments attempting to control the expression of opinion.¹ One has only to study the history of the censorship under Napoleon, or the Restoration, or the Second Empire, to realize how liberal Robespierre's policy was, and how different public life in France might have been, had it been accepted.

A curious incident, in connexion with this speech, is worth recording, as an instance of Robespierre's absence of

¹Dicey, *Law of the Constitution*, 248.

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mind. The day following its delivery, he drove home at half-past nine in the evening (he could afford such luxuries now), and left the MS. in the cab, together with a treatise on Popular Societies lent him by Lanthenas. He accordingly advertised his loss, offering a reward, and expressing the hope that 'patriots will do their best' to see that the papers are found. The chief sufferer by his carelessness was Lanthenas, who had spent several months copying out his MS., and had to start the work over again.¹

Within three weeks an incident happened which put Robespierre's views on freedom of speech to the test. On April 18 the king's attempt to leave Paris for Saint-Cloud was prevented by the people, who suspected him of attempted flight. On June 1, Montmorin, the Foreign Minister, called the attention of the Assembly to a passage in the *Moniteur* in which this incident was represented as an attempt of the royal family to escape to Brussels. Members on the Right demanded the punishment of the paper; but Robespierre objected, both on the general ground of liberty, and for the particular reason that they only had Montmorin's word for it that the report was untrue. The House as a whole agreed; and three weeks later their suspicions were justified by the flight to Varennes.

XIII

On May 27-8 Robespierre had his last say on two old topics—the *marc d'argent*, and the purity of elections. On the 30th he was faced with a new question, which touched him closely: should the *code pénal* include a provision for capital punishment? Not many years before, he had seriously considered whether he should give up a judgeship, rather than condemn a criminal to death.² But then it was death by torture, and involved the disgrace of the criminal's

¹The advertisement appeared in *L'Orateur du peuple*, Vol. 6, No. 18, p. 152, and is given in A.R. 2/97 (another version, apparently less accurate, from *l'Intermédiaire des chercheurs et curieux*, June 20-30, 1924, is in A.H. 1/462). For Lanthenas' account, v. *Corresp. de Mme Roland* (ed. Perroud), 2/280.

²v. 1/39.

family: now torture had been abolished,¹ murderers were to be decapitated like gentlemen, and he had himself conducted a campaign against the incrimination of their families. He might therefore have been excused if he had changed his mind, and supported the death penalty in the single case in which it was proposed to retain it, *viz.*, when 'a party leader was declared a rebel by decree of the Legislative Body'. But Robespierre's stiff mind could admit no exception to a moral rule; and he proceeded to prove, with examples drawn from the history of Greece, Rome, Russia, and Japan, that capital punishment was unjust, irreparable, degrading, and ineffective. The House, however, thought otherwise, and retained the death penalty for political crimes, thus opening the door to the Revolutionary Tribunal, the Reign of Terror, and the recurrent proscriptions, which, up to quite recent times, have given to party struggles in France the likeness of civil war. The irony of the situation—that the opponent of capital punishment in 1791 should demand the King's death in 1793, and sanction the executions of 1794—is obvious enough now. But a man of principle, though he can be trusted for a routine consistency, is, after all, more liable than any other to radical changes of moral allegiance. There is no conduct so incalculable as that of a fanatic.

The debate on capital punishment was still proceeding, when, on May 31, the President read to the House a letter which he had received from the abbé Raynal, criticizing the work of the Assembly, and demanding the restoration of the royal prerogative. This octogenarian survivor of the Prophetic age, whose *Histoire philosophique*² had earned him one term of banishment under Louis XV, seemed to be provoking another; but Robespierre, who knew something of the vanity of authors, and had no wish to encourage martyrdom, suggested that Raynal's letter might be excused,

¹Lewes (131) gives an instance of 'breaking on the wheel' as late as August, 1790.

²*Histoire philosophique et politique des . . . Européens dans les deux Indes*, the most advanced passages of which were due to Diderot. His present letter was encouraged by Malouet, and largely written by Clermont-Tonnerre. (Fletcher's ed. of Carlyle, 1/73.)

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as the ramblings of a dotard. The Assembly need do nothing but reassert its principles, and go on with its work. The House accepted this wise advice, and resumed its ordinary business. No one knew that Raynal was the favourite reading of a Norman girl who was to murder Marat.¹

XIV

Ever since the Nancy affair, the condition of the army had caused concern to the leaders of the Revolution. What, they asked, was the use of destroying aristocracy and royalism in the civil government of the country, if they were still rampant in its armed defences? The Jacobins, as was nowadays becoming the custom, first took up the question. On June 2 and 8, Anthoine and Roederer denounced royalism among the officers of the army. Robespierre was for drastic remedies: he would dismiss them all, and appoint new men. 'The man who does not wish or advise their dismissal,' he declared, 'is a traitor'.² But he feared militarism as much as royalism. 'There must be no attempt to turn our soldiers into machines.'³

When the question came up in the Assembly two days later, it was proposed to restore discipline in the army, not by the dismissal of officers, but by providing better training (*cantonnements*), imposing severe penalties for disorder, and demanding from every officer a written undertaking to obey and respect the Constitution. Robespierre's attack on this plan, all the more rhetorical because it was partly extemporized, won few votes, and a chance of 'purging' the army was thrown away. The creation of the National Guard had, no doubt, put it out of the power of the old army to reimpose a royalist regime. But, if Robespierre had had his way, there might have been no Bouillé or Choiseul to cover the king's flight to Varennes, no Swiss officers to defend

¹A.R. 6/309. André Chénier adopted a similar tone when answering Raynal's pamphlet in the *Moniteur* of June 2 and 5 (*ibid.*). Even Malouet praised this 'remarkable improvisation' of Robespierre's (Michon, *Adrien Duport*, 220).

²Some enthusiast demanded that 'this maxim should be inscribed in capital letters in every corner of the Hall' (*applause*).

³Jac. 2/490.

the Tuileries, no Dillon to be murdered by his runaway troops; and that process might have been speeded up, by which the armies of the Directory and Empire were officered by men of their own class, co-heirs of the Revolution.¹

Robespierre spoke only once more before the flight of the king, and that, too, was on a military question. The municipality of Brie-Comte-Robert had complained of the conduct of a detachment of *chasseurs* quartered upon the town. Robespierre took up their case, and called for an inquiry (June 18). His rather inquisitorial manner prompted one of the deputies to ask whether he was already practising for the office of Public Prosecutor, to which he had just been elected. He retorted that it was a matter of public interest. But nothing was done, even when, two months later, one of the victims of the soldiery died in prison (August 6). It would seem that Robespierre had good reason for his dread of militarism.

By the middle of June it seemed likely that the Constitution would soon be finished, and that the country would be asked to elect its new Legislative Assembly. It was proposed that the primary elections (of electors) should be held on June 12-25, and the secondary elections (of deputies) on July 5. On June 19, the Jacobins listened to an address to the electoral assemblies which Robespierre had drawn up at the request of the Correspondence Committee of the club. The electors, he tells them, will be paid (*cheers*), on account of their loss of time. Their duty will be to choose candidates primarily for their patriotism (*vertu*); but they must beware of 'deceptive appearances', and 'reject the false friends of liberty'.

XV

It is impossible to read through the debates of April-June, 1791, without feeling that Robespierre had gone far

¹Pio, an Italian who had been given French citizenship, wrote to *Révolutions de France et de Brabant* (No. 81, June 15), saying that Robespierre deserved a civic crown for the stand he made on this occasion. (Hamel, 1/473.)

towards realizing his ambition, and filling Mirabeau's place. In a series of great issues—legal, constitutional, diplomatic, military, and colonial—his carefully argued and eloquently expressed speeches had become a regular feature of public business; and he was regarded not only in the House, but also in Paris and in the provinces, as the chief exponent of revolutionary progress. If his devotion to principles sometimes made him intransigent, or difficult to work with, there were also occasions when his detachment gave him an uncanny insight, and a power of prophecy. If he was often in a minority in the Assembly, he as often expressed the views of the majority in the streets. If, in minor matters, he showed the gifts of a parliamentary tactician, it was by refusing to accept compromises in major matters that he won a reputation for political rectitude. There were some more brilliant men in public life, and many with more attractive qualities; but probably none whose future success could more certainly be foreseen. For it was founded, not only on intense application and self-culture, but also on self-identification with a society, and with a cause. 'If Robespierre's voice seems suddenly to have grown louder, it is because it is no longer an individual who is speaking, but a whole people—the members of the Jacobin clubs'.¹ Royalist pamphleteers might dub him disparagingly 'the candle of Arras', and contrast him with Mirabeau, 'the torch of Provence',² but his advance was already being noted, and his future greatness predicted, by foreign observers. 'The man held of least account,' wrote an English traveller, 'by Mirabeau, by Lafayette, and even by the Lameths, and all the Orleans faction, will soon be of the first consideration. He is cool, measured, and resolved. He is in his heart Republican, honestly so, not to pay court to the multitude, but from an opinion that it is the very best, if not the only form of government which men ought to admit. He is a stern man, rigid in his principles, plain, unaffected in his manners, no foppery in his dress, certainly above corruption, despising wealth, and with nothing of the volatility of

¹Michelet, 3/4.

²Fleischmann, 111.

a Frenchman in his character. . . . I watch him very closely every night. I read his countenance with eyes steadily fixed on him. He is really a character to be contemplated; he is growing every hour into consequence'.¹

XVI

How far can the gaps of Robespierre's political life, during the first six months of 1791, be filled up from his correspondence, or from other sources of evidence?

The extant letters during this period fall into three groups—private letters of January–February; correspondence with public bodies during April–June; and another group of private letters belonging to June.

The private correspondence shows several aspects of Robespierre, the public man. Daunou, a prominent Oratorian, asks for his help in securing the position of his Order under recent ecclesiastical legislation. One of the troubles of his busy life, Robespierre replies, is that he cannot send immediate answers even to the letters that interest him most, such as Daunou's. 'But the name of the Oratory recalls images and memories which will always be dear'; and he will do what he can. There is no clericalism in the letter, and nothing anti-clerical; simply the courtesy of equals who have memories in common, and who might become friends.²

A trace of the old artificiality of *Rosati* days appears in the reply to Mme Guyard, who had asked to be allowed to paint Robespierre's portrait. 'They tell me,' he writes, 'that the Graces wish to paint a likeness of me. I should be quite unworthy of such kindness, if I did not keenly appreciate its value. Unluckily a surfeit of business worries—or it may be some jealous deity—has hitherto prevented my expressing to them all the gratitude I feel; and the respect that is their due must be prefaced by the apologies I owe. I beg them accordingly to accept the one, and to inform me of the day and hour when I may present the other.' That is neatly put; and it would be pleasant to have the rest of the story.

¹W. A. Miles to Pye, March 1, 1791.

²Corresp. 55; A.R. 14/428; R.H.R.F. 4/114.

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It is known that Mme Labille-Guyard exhibited in the Salon of 1791 thirteen portraits of public men of all parties, and that none of them was more admired than No. 34, that of *l'Incorruptible*—a pastel, preserved only in Drouhin's popular engraving.¹

Another portrait of Robespierre hung there too, as we know from a private letter, in which it is thus described: 'No. 215. M. Boze: Portrait of Robespierre, in pastel: a marvellous likeness. Everyone, my friend, stands in front of this worthy (*respectable*) man; some offer their tribute in phrases, calling him "the incorruptible legislator", or "the friend of mankind"; and some in verses, and more verses. Among others I noticed these lines, modelled on some in the tragedy of *Tancred*:

"To every pure-born heart how dear
Is Maximilien Robespierre!"

M. Boze is exhibiting other portraits of little merit; but, however bad they were, one would always be grateful to him for so fine a rendering of our greatest man (*notre premier homme*), whom he has seen, whom he has addressed, and whom he has actually touched. Oh! M. Boze, what happy days you must have spent in his company! Such sentimentalities are sufficient proof of the position Robespierre held in public esteem in the summer of 1791.²

The letter of February 14 to Desmoulins, written two months after his marriage to Lucille Duplessis, suggests other thoughts. 'May I remind M. Camille Desmoulins,' it begins, 'that neither the fine eyes nor the engaging qualities of the charming Lucile are sufficient reason for not advertising my work on the National Guard?' There is a trace of spitefulness here that might have warned Desmoulins how lightly personal claims would weigh with this man, com-

¹Corresp. 58; Fleischmann, 110; Charavay, *Assemblée électorale de Paris*, 2/xxxiv. Mme Guyard afterwards married the painter Vincent, who gave this letter to Lord Egerton, and so it reached the British Museum. The reference to 'the Graces' gains point from the fact that Boilly, who painted Robespierre at Arras about 1783, was known as *le peintre des Grâces*.

²R.H.R.F. 3/131. Boze was court painter to Louis XVI. The portrait is supposed to have been in the possession of Albertine Marat, who presented it to the *Cabinet des Étranges* in Paris (A.R. 1/645).

pared with public duty. Within little more than three years the writer would be signing warrants for the arrest of his friend, and of his friend's wife, and regarding it as a patriotic act to send them both to the guillotine.¹

Mme Guyard was not the only one of the Graces who admired Robespierre. Jeanne-Marguerite Chalabre was a well-to-do woman of thirty-nine, with some pretensions to a title,² who opened a correspondence with him about this time. The first extant letter is one in which she thanks him for a copy of his speech on juries. She wants to talk to him about the political situation, and tries to tempt him to come to dinner. 'You needn't fear,' she says, a 'big party of mugwumps: there will be nobody here but a very few—really a very few—old friends, and all of them good patriots'. Robespierre seems to have got out of this invitation; for not long afterwards she asks him again, allowing him to choose his own time. After this, there is a long gap in the correspondence; and the next letter shows the lion-hunter still pursuing her prey with flattery and admiration, in spite of his admonitions 'not to be so enthusiastic'. The only other published letter shows that, two months later again, Mme Chalabre was attending the Assembly to hear Robespierre speak, and was on friendly terms with his hosts, the Duplays. It is not surprising that in July, 1794, she was involved in his fall, and spent nearly a year in prison. Nothing more remains, except a forlorn letter in the National Archives, in which she abjures her old friend.³

XVII

An important group of letters shows Robespierre's relations with several public bodies.

¹Corresp. 59. Robespierre was not the only one of Desmoulins' friends who thought his marriage was distracting him from his political duties. (A.R. 8/567.)

²Fleischmann, 226.

³Corresp. 60, 61, 115, 123. Mathiez (*Conspiration*, 156) accepts the story that Robespierre visited her at Vanves; but it does not follow, as Sénart asserts (*Révélation*, 150) that she was his 'Cerberus', through whom many who had requests to make of him forwarded their communications. Fleischmann (236) prints another (undated) document from the Fillon Collection as a letter from Mme Chalabre to Robespierre; but internal evidence is against this ascription.

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After his intervention in the Avignon debate, and his speeches on the National Guard, both matters of special concern to them, the patriots of Marseille came to regard Robespierre as a possible champion of their own interests; so that, when Mirabeau died, the Municipality wrote, asking for his help against a decree extending the powers of the royal commissioners at Aix, and infringing on the departmental administration.¹ Unfortunately, as is explained in his letter of May 24, the matter came up in the House at a time when he was absent through illness or overwork. He apologizes for this, with a politeness that verges on flattery. There is no title, he says, that he would sooner bear than that of defender of Marseille. Its cause is the cause of all good Frenchmen. 'You and I,' he ends, 'will continue to watch over liberty and our country, and to protect them with all our power in these critical times'.² Another letter from the Mayor (May 27) is answered towards the end of July, with apology for delay, and with fresh expressions of devotion; and on August 10 he writes again in the same strain, enclosing a copy of his *Adresse aux français*.³ By this time he was in correspondence with the Aix Commissioners, and hearing their side of the case, which did not agree with that of his clients at Marseille.⁴ In January, 1792, the Club Thulaireau of Marseille placed a portrait of Robespierre beside those it already had of Mirabeau and Paoli; and when the Marseillais commissioners, Loys and Barbaroux, arrived in Paris in February, 1792, their first visits were to Pétion and to Robespierre, whom they reported to be as fond of Marseille as though it were his native town.⁵

Robespierre had won the respect of the Versailles patriots, as of those of Marseille, by his willingness to champion their interests in the Assembly. They had already rewarded his help in the matter of a disputed election by

¹cp. 1/107. A.R. 15/113; Corresp. 65.

²Corresp. 70.

³Corresp. 88.

⁴A.H. 63/260.

⁵Barbaroux, *Correspondance*, February 13, 1792; Chabaud in A.R. 15/113. Robespierre's championship of Marseille was not forgotten. As late as December, 1851, one of those proscribed by Napoleon III, proposed to erect on the Pic du Canigon a tower inscribed with his name, to be *le phare du Midi révolutionnaire*. (R.H. 134 148.

making him a judge in the local tribunal.¹ On October 8 he accepted an invitation to become a member of the Versailles Jacobin club. On February 17 he sent them his speech on the National Guard: the club so approved of it that they urged their affiliated societies to support its proposals. Later, he sent them also his speeches on juries and on the *marc d'argent*; and, in reply to a request for information about the political situation at Saint-Omer, gave a testimonial to the good character of the Jacobin club there.²

Of greater interest and importance is the long letter of June 13, in which Robespierre explains to his friends at Versailles the motives which have led him to give up the judgeship he had held there for the last eight months, and to accept the post of *accusateur public* in the criminal tribunal of the Department of Paris. 'My appointment,' he writes, 'has at once surprised and alarmed me. It burdens me with functions that could not be less congenial to my tastes and disposition. It involves me in a whirlpool of delicate, difficult, and momentous affairs, at a moment when I am exhausted by an accumulation of tasks and anxieties. I was hoping for a position in which I might get some time to myself, and devote myself to the study and exposition of the great truths which underlie the laws and the policy befitting a free people'. If he had been ambitious for a further term of public service, he goes on, he would have preferred re-election to some future legislature. The post at Versailles offered a peaceful alternative. But it was his duty to accept the more urgent and dangerous post at the strategic centre of the Revolution. He would like, nevertheless, to keep in touch with the Versailles club, and will attend their meetings whenever he can. All this is explained at a length, and with a solemnity, which sounds disproportionate to the occasion, and which (one feels) has its origin less in the courtesy due to Robespierre's friends at Versailles than in his intense interest in himself. The seminary influence is still alive in him. The scruples he urges are those of a

¹v. 1/106.

²Vaillandet in A.H. 8/49; Corresp. 63, 72.

moral theologian: his confidences are the whispers of the confessional.

As a pendant to this letter, under the same date, appears Robespierre's formal leave-taking, forwarded through the *procureur-général-syndic* of the Department.¹

Robespierre's correspondence with Toulon runs a course parallel to that with Marseille. He had won the regard of the citizens so long ago as December 14, 1789, by upholding their action against the officers of the naval garrison. He had defended them again in the debates of June-August, 1790.² They rewarded him for these services, towards the end of that year, or early in 1791, by inscribing his name on the civic roll of honour (*dans les fastes de la ville*), and in the following June by giving him the title of *citoyen de Toulon*; for, as they said, 'what more perfect model of public spirit could we set before our citizens than yourself?' Robespierre replied with compliments, and presentation copies of his latest speech. He explains, as he did to the Marseillais, that only illness had prevented him attending to their interests on May 21; and he exhorts them, as the *magistrat vertueux* of a people worthy of freedom (for he has just been made Public Prosecutor) to continue firm in their support of liberty and the constitution. A month later he thanks the Toulon Jacobins for the *titre glorieux* they have bestowed upon him—presumably that of honorary member of their club; and finally, on the day on which he sends a copy of his *Adresse aux français* to the Marseillais, he encloses another to his friends at Toulon, and receives a complimentary reply.³

Robespierre's election as *accusateur public* took place on June 10, and was one of the last acts of the electoral assembly

¹Corresp. 77-8 (June 13). The appointment as *accusateur public* appears in the *Moniteur* of June 19, but was doubtless settled before. The Versailles club took Robespierre's resignation well, applauding his speech on the army (July 7), supporting his stand against the Feuillants (after July 17), thanking him for his *Adresse aux français* (August 11), and keeping up a friendly correspondence with him (Vaillandet in A.H. 8/54).

²v. 1/98.

³Corresp. 64, 66, 67, 74, 80, 85, 91, 92; Parès, *Robespierre, citoyen de Toulon*. Another copy of the *Adresse* was sent to the Jacobins of Toulouse, and read there amidst 'a religious silence' (A.H. 3/584).

of 781 business men and lawyers, representing the 'active' citizens of Paris, which, since November 18, 1790, had appointed most of the personnel—judges, curés, and departmental administrators—of the new regime.¹ He was chosen by a large majority. D'André, the runner-up, was elected to the office of *substitut*, but refused it;² whilst Duport, who had been elected to the presidency of the court on the 9th, resigned, as he had threatened to do, rather than work with Robespierre. These refusals were expressed in terms which suggested that Robespierre stood for an attack upon the security of person and property, and was therefore unfit to hold his new post. D'André's objections were honest, but Duport's real reasons were found in private animosity: he had, it seems, never forgiven Robespierre for his proposals of May 16 and 18, or for his attitude towards the Colonial question.³

XVIII

There remain a few private letters belonging to June, 1791. Joseph Lebon, formerly *professeur* of Rhetoric at the Oratorian college at Beaune, was now 'constitutional' vicar of Vernois. He had written to the Assembly on November 2, 1790, saying that he was destitute, and asking that the decrees on clerical pensions might be amended to cover his own case.⁴ As a fellow-countryman and acquaintance of Robespierre, he addresses him (June 3) in the second person singular, and mixes familiarity with flattery. '*Courage, mon brave ami,*' he begins; 'you have only one more step to take (he is thinking of the imminent dissolution of the Assembly), and you will leave political life almost unique among our legislators, as incorrupt as you entered it'. Knowing how busy Robespierre is, he has hesitated to write before, but now urges him to revive the proposal for clerical marriage which he had first made a year ago.⁵ 'Secure,' he

¹Charavay in R.F. 18/377.

²D'André's Letter of June 15, 1791 (Charavay, *Assemblée électorale de Paris*, 1/612).

³Michon, *Adrien Duport*, 221.

⁴R.F. 64/229.

⁵v. 1/85.

says, 'the final destruction of that execrable requirement to cheat the demands of nature, which has hitherto been the ruin of morality and of the laws'. Besides, he adds, evidently with some feeling, a bachelor priest is taxed at a higher rate than a married one. He re-opens the letter to ask whether, under the *marc d'argent* decree, he is eligible for election to the new Assembly, and to suggest that, if he is not, a decree should be put through, qualifying priests who possess private means (*un patrimoine d'environ 2000 francs*).¹

There will be other letters from Lebon. Their increasing familiarity and vulgarity cannot but have given rise, in Robespierre's fastidious mind, to some doubts as to the company he was keeping: but he believed the man honest and useful, and supported him, during his later exploits as a terrorist at Arras, to the last possible moment.²

• He is on happier terms with his *cher et joyeux ami*, Buissart, to whom he writes at once (June 12) with the news of his appointment as Public Prosecutor, mentioning the intrigues which nearly prevented his election, and his dislike of giving up his post at Versailles. 'I am destined,' he says, 'to lead a stormy career. I must follow it out to the end—until I have made the last great sacrifice to my country. I am in a constant state of over-work. I cannot exchange ideas with you as often as I should like to do'.

There follow two letters from a more distinguished friend, though not such a faithful one. Pétion first writes (June 15) to say that he has been nominated in place of Duport to the presidency of the criminal court, and that Buzot has replaced d'André. He would have come to see Robespierre, he adds, 'but I said to myself, I shan't find him in; he is always out to dinner'—a note on Robespierre's habits which confirms Charlotte's reminiscences.³

The second letter is undated, but clearly belongs to the

¹Corresp. 73. The position of the clergy under the franchise laws was obscure. Aulard (66) can only quote Robespierre himself as suggesting that they ranked as 'active' citizens.

²Jacob, *Joseph Lebon*; cp. *Index*.

³Corresp. 79, Charlotte, 218. A letter from Robespierre to Réal (Corresp. 82) assures him that Buzot is legally qualified for election. Cp. Charavay, *Assemblée électorale de Paris*, 613.

same period, when, as *accusateur public*, Robespierre had the supervision of the Paris prisons. Pétion writes, asking leave for one of his family, his friend, and his landlord, to supply medical necessities to poor prisoners—a reminder that even in these urgent times politics and philanthropy breathed the same air.¹

XIX

The Robespierre of June, 1791, has not only more authority as a speaker and politician, but also more social poise and confidence, than six months ago. He can write as tactfully to an artist as to an ecclesiastic, to a journalist as to a *procureur-général-syndic*. He knows how to accept a citizenship, and how to avoid an invitation to dinner. Although he is overwhelmed with his work at the Jacobins, and in the Assembly, and must sit up far into the night composing and correcting a series of great speeches, yet he finds time to write a letter of over a thousand words to save the feelings of a suburban committee. He has, indeed, had at least one week's illness, and is wearing himself out by his conscientiousness. He has been looking forward—and his friends with him—to the speedy completion of the Constitution, and to the dissolution of the Assembly, which will enable him to retire for a while into private life. Then comes the call to the judgeship in Paris, which he cannot well refuse, if only because his brother is still out of work, and which, without the strain of Parliamentary life, is not inconsistent with some pursuit of study and authorship.

Such is the future he is planning, when the king's flight to Varennes, on June 21, transforms the whole political scene, prolongs the labours of the Assembly, postpones the Constitution, and drowns all private claims in the urgency of a national crisis. The opportunity for retirement passed, and never returned.

¹Corresp. 83

CHAPTER VI

THE SAVIOUR OF THE JACOBIN CLUB

(JUNE—NOVEMBER, 1791)

I

THE flight to Varennes probably had a more decisive influence than any other single event upon the course of the French Revolution. Earlier incidents—the Tennis Court oath, the fall of the Bastille, or the march of the women to Versailles—had directed its torrent in a certain direction. Now, for a year and a half, the revolution had flowed, not without an occasional spate or drought, along a fairly defined channel, and the voyager might well think himself within sight of the sea. Varennes was a sudden land-fall, damming up the stream, so that it broke through, a year later, with redoubled force, and irreparable disaster.

The monarchy, which had hitherto seemed the one familiar element in the State, the solitary link between the old France and the new, was now to become a hostile and almost foreign power, standing between the country and its destiny. The Assembly, which had come to regard itself as inspired, and supposed its laws written on tables of stone, was soon to be discredited as a middle-class caucus, and its Constitution dashed to pieces. The common people, gradually disillusioned as to all they had hoped for from a peaceful revolution, were to turn against their old representatives, and drive their new leaders into war, and a Republic.

In the course of this fourteen months' turmoil the Constituent Assembly came to an end, and the Legislative Assembly took its place. This change, with the corresponding break in Robespierre's political life, affords the first

convenient halting-place; but there is no real breach in the continuous development of events towards the catastrophe of August, 1792.

II

On June 20 Robespierre had been away from Paris—perhaps visiting his Jacobin friends at Versailles. He knew no more than others did of the king's intention to escape; if he guessed that there were plans, he can have had no idea that they were so advanced. When, early on the morning of the 21st, the news went round that the royal family had fled during the night, and crowds began to flow towards the Tuileries; when, at nine o'clock, Robespierre heard in the Assembly the official version of the flight, and the accusing document that Louis had left behind; he shared the general feelings of anger and alarm; but he played his part in that calm and dignified behaviour of the deputies which did so much to prevent public panic, and to suggest the possibility of a French Republic. He had, however, by this time, become deeply suspicious of the Constitutionalists, and foresaw that the unusual docility of the House might be exploited in party interests. It was significant that, whereas Louis' memoir showed that he had fled deliberately, Bailly maintained that he had been 'carried off by the enemies of the state'; and that, whilst the king was approaching the frontier, and appealing for foreign aid, Paris was still garrisoned by royal troops, whose allegiance to the Assembly was by no means sure. Robespierre's first act, on hearing of the king's capture at Varennes, was to propose the award of civic crowns to the two citizens who had arrested him, and to Mangin, the local surgeon who had brought the news. But when, later in the evening, Thouret moved that all who had helped in the flight should be declared traitors, and that any who showed disrespect to the royal authority should be thrown into prison, he at once objected to such measures as prejudging the character of the flight, and insulting the people. That night, at the Jacobins, he showed more clearly what was in his mind. He believed that the

ministers, and some others who, like Lafayette, passed for patriots, had known more than they should about the king's plans, and were exploiting the situation in the interests of reaction.¹ But that was not all; for he had come to think that there was a conspiracy afoot, not only against France, but against himself—'one man of honesty and courage prepared to unmask their plots, one man who thinks so lightly of life that he fears neither poison nor the sword, and would be supremely happy if his death contributed to the freedom of his fatherland'. Upon which (it is reported) Desmoulins cried, 'We would all give our lives to save yours!'; and the whole audience of 800 rose, and took an oath to defend Robespierre's life.

With some speakers it might be possible to regard such words as a theatrical gesture, and no more. But although Robespierre was self-centred enough to like to picture himself as a martyr, he was also too shrewd to cry 'Wolf!' unless some such animal was really in sight. And this strain in his speeches soon becomes so common as to force the inquiry whether it may have had some ground in actual fact.

For more than a year now Robespierre had been the chief butt of the aristocratic party. He speaks in April, 1790, of 'the hatred with which the aristocrats regard me', and he is afraid of their opening his correspondence.² Augustin's letters are full of alarms and gloomy anticipations, not only whilst he is at Arras, and imagining the worst of Paris, but also when he is living in the capital, and in constant touch with his brother.³ This atmosphere of danger seems to dissipate itself for a while in the early months of 1791, when Robespierre has won a secure position in the country and in the House. But the king's flight may very well have seemed to him the unmasking of a fresh and more serious attack—a definite attempt to stop the Revolution, in which

¹On June 26 an exiled Belgian patriot, named Van Miest, reported to Robespierre from London that the news of the king's flight had delighted the aristocrats, and that they were in despair at his recapture (Corresp. 81).

²Corresp. 27, 30.

³Corresp. 31, 33, 34, 40, 51. Several popular leaders had been challenged to duels (Lewes, 161).

the lives of all democratic leaders might be at stake.¹ Was he so far wrong? If the king had succeeded in reaching Montmédy, and placing himself in the hands of Bouillé, the *émigrés*, and the Austrian army, could the thing have ended, and was it meant to end, in anything less than an armed march on Paris, the dissolution of the Assembly, and the proscription of Robespierre and his friends? 'Mr. Robespierre, the great *Dénonciateur*,' writes Lord Gower on July 22, 'is about to be *dénoncé* himself'; and a certain Dumas de Labrousse was reported to have said, on June 21, that he had gibbets ready to hang the members of the Assembly, and of the Jacobins, especially Barnave and Robespierre, whom he oddly regarded as 'two Protestants who had destroyed religion'.²

Nor were Robespierre's alarms at this crisis peculiar to himself. Such, indeed, is the impression given by Mme Roland's *Memoirs*, written in the prison to which Robespierre's party had consigned her, and in a mood in which she was not likely to remember her early weakness for the successful young Liberal. 'I had been struck,' she says, 'with the terror which seemed to obsess him on the day of the King's flight to Varennes. . . . I found him that afternoon at Pétion's house, saying in a tone of alarm that the royal family would never have taken this step unless they had in Paris a body of supporters ready to organize a massacre (*Saint-Barthélemy*) of patriots, and that he did not expect to outlive the day'. But Mme Roland conveniently forgot that she had written a very different account of this incident to her friend Bancal des Issarts only a few hours afterwards. 'Yesterday evening,' the letter runs, 'a number of us met, including Robespierre, and agreed that our lives hung by a thread (*nous nous considérions sous le couteau*). Each of us was preoccupied with the question, how best to serve the public weal before losing our lives, as we might in some unforeseen massacre'.³ The Cordeliers club took the matter so seriously

¹Robespierre had inside information as to the wholesale and arbitrary arrests which were made at the time of the 'massacre'. (Corresp. 97.)

²Tuetey, 2/2681.

³*Corresp.* (ed. Perroud) 2/306. Her letters at this time are full of praise of Robespierre.

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that it sent a guard to protect Robespierre on the night of June 21.¹ It was stated on July 10 that a secret society had put a price on his head, and that he was known to have made his will, and to be expecting martyrdom at any moment. The same alarm was felt in the provinces. The Jacobin Club at Marseille wrote saying that if Robespierre or Danton, those 'apostles of liberty', were threatened, the Marseillais would fly to their defence.²

There was sufficient reason, then, for the scene at the Jacobins on the evening of June 21; and there is no need to accuse Robespierre either of striking theatrical attitudes, or of being the victim of a 'persecution complex'. The most that it seems reasonable to allow is that the strain of overwork and anxiety from which he was suffering may have led him to exaggerate the danger.³

III

Whether or not Lafayette and the Moderate leaders of the Assembly—Bailly, Barnave, Duport, the Lameths, and their friends—were privy to the king's flight, they certainly behaved as though they had made up their minds from the first how they were going to use it. From the first—witness Bailly's speech of June 21—they represented the flight as an abduction (*enlèvement*).⁴ As soon as Louis' recapture was known, Thouret was ready (June 23) with a decree that suggested his rehabilitation, as though he had done nothing improper for a king. And such was, in fact, to be the official policy. No doubt this line of action could be defended in the national interests. The moderates argued that Louis restored would be a hostage for peace, whereas Louis dethroned would be a pretext for foreign intervention, and war.⁵ But they had another motive which came

¹Mathiez, *Club des Cordeliers*, 47.

²Jac. 2/549.

³Dumont is romancing when he says that Robespierre hid himself for two days, and meditated flight to Marseille. (*The Great Frenchman*, 196.)

⁴Even the Jacobin Club wrote to its affiliated societies that *le roi, égaré par des suggestions criminelles, s'est éloigné de l'Assemblée nationale*. (R.F. 22/107.)

⁵v. a passage from *La Correspondance nationale*, quoted by Mathiez, 129.

nearer home. They had made up their minds that a revengeful people was more to be feared than a disloyal king. Louis was to be exculpated and restored, under the supervision of the Constitutional party, to save the country from republicanism. Robespierre, with his usual clear-headedness, saw through this policy, and set himself to oppose it. When Duport proposed (June 26) that the evidence of the king and queen, for the judicial inquiry into their flight, should be taken by commissioners specially chosen from among the deputies, he objected, not so much to an attempt to save the royal feelings, as to the opportunity afforded to misrepresent the facts. The king and queen, he said, were at this moment no more than any other citizen and his wife, owing an account of their conduct to the nation; and they ought to conform to the ordinary procedure. When Muguet, a fortnight later (July 13), in the official report on what was now called 'Bouillé's conspiracy', proposed to indict Bouillé and Fersen (who was well out of the country) before the Supreme Court, but to pass over the king's responsibility, on the ground that he was beyond the reach of the law, Robespierre boldly challenged the whole idea of inviolability. First, he says, the maxim, 'The king can do no wrong' (such is his meaning, though he does not use the English terms) cannot apply to private acts of the king, but only to those for which a minister is held responsible. But, secondly, if the king is answerable, there may still be no court by which he can be tried. In that case, he does not shrink from a dangerous alternative. 'The Law of Nature,' he says, 'is prior to society, and teaches men that, when the laws do not avenge their wrongs, they have the right to avenge themselves'. Thirdly, Robespierre refuses to allow distinctions of guilt between the criminals of June 21: either they must all be convicted, from Louis XVI to Mme Tourzel, or all discharged. Speaking again on the 15th, he expounded his view of the kind of evidence needed in such a trial. 'If there were actual proof of Monsieur's guilt,' he said, 'there would be no question about returning a true bill. . . . But it is not necessary to have proofs of guilt, in

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order to commit a man for trial; suspicions (*indices*) are enough.'

The deputies, in the full swing of their reaction against the popular temper, paid little attention to these remarks: had they done so, they might have realized what a short step it might be from such doctrines to a king's trial, a Revolutionary Tribunal, and a Prairial Law. As for Robespierre himself, outvoted on July 14, laughed at on the 15th, and shouted down on the 23rd, he made no further attempt to speak in the House till August 6.¹

IV

Indeed, his position, not only in the Assembly, but also at the club, was at this time full of difficulties. Republicanism had almost suddenly become a political issue, threatening to overturn the flimsy constitutionalism of Bailly and Barnave; and Robespierre, who never cared to hurry his decisions, had to make up his mind about it. It may be true that on June 21, when Pétion and Brissot maintained that the king's flight spelt the doom of the monarchy, and that they had better prepare public opinion for a republic, 'Robespierre, with his habitual grimace, and biting his nails, asked, What is a republic?'² Even if he were prepared for the idea—and perhaps he was not—it was certainly one that needed defining. The word *république* had not yet lost its Latin meaning, or its Roman associations. A Frenchman of the eighteenth century could talk of a 'monarchical republic', or of a 'republican monarchy', meaning in either case a state in which autocracy was tempered by some degree of popular representation; and republicanism in 1791 would be judged less by its theories than by its acts. When, therefore, Robespierre maintained that the king's flight had destroyed the constitutional safeguards of the crown, when he demanded the trial of the royal family and

¹On the 14th he had unsuccessfully opposed Desmeuniers' proposal for the temporary suspension of the king's executive powers. Mme Roland was enthusiastic for the stand he made against the 'coalition' (*Corresp.* ed. Perroud 2/328).

²Mme Roland's *Mémoires* (ed. Barrière), 255.

its accomplices before the ordinary courts of the land, it was easy for his enemies to accuse him of republicanism.

His formal answer to the charge was made in a speech at the Jacobins on July 13. 'I have been accused,' he said, 'in the bosom of the Assembly, of being a republican. My enemies do me too much honour: I am nothing of the sort. Had they accused me of monarchism, they would have done me too little honour; for neither am I a monarchist. I will begin by observing that there are plenty of people to whom the words "monarchy" and "republic" mean absolutely nothing. The word "republic" does not mean any particular form of government: it is applicable to every form of government under which men enjoy freedom and a fatherland (*tout gouvernement d'hommes libres qui ont une patrie*); and one may be as free under a king as under a senate. What is the French constitution at the actual moment? It is not a monarchy: it is not a republic: it is both.¹ Nothing could be clearer than this, or truer to the tradition of French thought. It was a complete answer to Robespierre's critics. Nevertheless, what his followers wanted, at the crisis of July, 1791, was not a lecture on Constitutional Law, but a lead against the constitutionalists; and that he could not quite make up his mind to give.² The democratic party was divided. All sections of it, indeed, wished for the definite deposition (*déchéance*) of the king, instead of the temporary suspension which was part of the Moderate plan; but they could not co-operate in the next step. The leaders of the Cordeliers Club, and many of the journalists and politicians, who, up to the end of June, had indulged in republican propaganda, thought that, once Louis was dethroned, the Dauphin should be put in his place, either under the regency of the Duc d'Orléans, or supervised by a committee of the Assembly: Marat, Danton,³ Pétion, and Brissot, knowing the character of Orléans, and not being

¹Jac. 3/12.

²Louis Blanc (5/461) thinks that Robespierre was really a republican at this time, but thought it dangerous to say so.

³Danton's membership of the reactionary *Bons Enfants* club made him suspect at this time. Challenged by Robespierre, he proved his patriotism, and went even further in the direction of republicanism. (A.R. 2/249.)

unwilling to assume power, preferred the second alternative. But this plan did not please republicans either of the type of Robert, the editor of the *Mercure National*, and his wife (formerly Mlle Kéralio, of the Arras Academy), or like Condorcet and Thomas Paine, the author of the republican manifesto of June 23; and this left wing was supported by a crowd of lesser men, products of the 'popular' and 'fraternal' societies, under the leadership of Hébert, Chaumette, Hanriot, and their like—men who had helped to pull down the symbols of royalty from the streets and shop-fronts on June 21, and now hoped to pull down royalty itself.

V

On July 13, when Muguet's motion for the king's suspension came before the House, crowds gathered outside the *Manège*, and clamoured for his deposition. On the 14th the Cordeliers Club presented a petition for a plebiscite to be held on this issue; but the Assembly refused to hear it. On the 15th they sent six *commissaires* to the House with a fresh address in much the same terms as that of the day before; but when they reached the House, they were informed by Pétion and Robespierre that they came too late: Muguet's decree had just been carried. They thereupon asked for something in writing which they could show to those who had sent them, and were given a letter, signed by Pétion and Robespierre, explaining that such petitions as theirs were liable to be misunderstood by the enemies of the people, and to embarrass its representatives. With this warning the commissioners went on, first to the *Amis de la Vérité*, and then, with a crowd of followers, to the Jacobin Club.¹ Here it was decided that both clubs (Jacobin and Cordeliers) should join in a manifesto calling for the king's deposition; and this was drafted the same night by Brissot, in terms which spoke of the 'replacement of Louis XIV by constitu-

¹One of the six, Jacques Varlet, wrote an account of the affair, in an apologia of April 8, 1792 (Brit. Mus. F. 353 (3)).

tional means'—any suggestion of a republic being carefully avoided. In the course of the 16th this formula was read aloud by Danton and others to the crowds which had assembled on the Champ de Mars, and met with a good deal of criticism: the phrase 'constitutional means' (*moyens constitutionnels*), in particular, was suspected of covering Orleanist or even royalist designs: but the Jacobins insisted upon its retention, as a security against a republican interpretation of the petition.¹ The same day the Assembly finally voted for the king's suspension until he should have approved the completed Constitution. This rendered the petition illegal, and the Jacobins cancelled it, while it was still at the printer's. But the extremer party in the Cordeliers refused to stop, and determined upon a fresh petition, demanding the king's trial, and the organization of what (still avoiding the word 'republic'), they called 'a new Executive' (*un nouveau pouvoir exécutif*). This petition was drawn up on the 'altar of the country' in the Champ de Mars the following day (July 17), and signed there by more than 6,000 persons;² and it was some fifty of these signatories who were shot down on the steps of the altar by National Guardsmen, under the orders of Lafayette (the Commandant), Bailly (the Mayor), and the municipality of Paris.

The 'massacre of the Champ de Mars' was never forgotten or forgiven. It opened a breach between the Constitutionalists and the Republicans, between the *bourgeoisie* and the *ouvriers*, which could not be closed even by a national war, or by the establishment of a French Republic. Both parties had put themselves in the wrong—the demonstrators, by rejecting the verdict of the General Will, as expressed by the National Assembly; and the city authorities, by using martial law against their fellow-citizens, whose disfranchisement left them no means of expressing

¹v. Robespierre's speech at the Jacobins on the 16th, reported only in *Bouche de fer* (Hamel, I/511).

²They included Chaumette, Sergeant, Momoro, Meunier, Hébert, Hanriot, Santerre, Maillard, David, and Coffinhal. v. a detailed account of the document and signatures in Michelet, 3/206.

their views but that of public petition. The blunder, on the government side, was probably due less to policy than to panic; but it might have been defended at the time as a seasonable attempt to enforce public order. The provocation, on the side of the people, was caused by lack of unity and leadership. None of the Jacobin politicians come particularly well out of it—not even Robespierre.

He had, indeed, taken a bold decision, when he demanded the king's trial; he had begun the attack against the Constitutional party; he had accused the Assembly of betraying the interests of the nation. Yet, when the sense of the House went against him on the 15th, he drew back, and became as cautious as any Constitutionalist, telling the Cordeliers deputation that it was too late to protest, and opposing the joint petition of the 16th. During the critical hours of the 17th he was at the Jacobins, sending out delegates, like doves from the ark, to see whether the disorders of the Champ de Mars were abated, and lamenting the sad state of affairs.¹ And when the massacre was over, he had no blame for either party. 'Let us weep,' he wrote, 'for those citizens who have perished: let us weep even for those citizens who, in good faith, were the instruments of their death. Let us in any case try to find one ground of consolation in this great disaster: let us hope that all our citizens, armed as well as unarmed, will take warning from this dire example, and hasten to swear peace and concord by the side of these newly dug graves'.²

What is to be made of this moderation? Was it the timidity of the debating-hall politician called to translate his words into acts? Was it a strain of Arras legalism re-asserting itself? Was it due to the knowledge that the Moderates were waiting for an excuse to proscribe the democrat leaders, and that any support of the petitioners of the 17th would give them what they wanted? That certainly: but it was more. It was a new fear, which the events of the last three weeks had intensified, of what might happen to the cause of liberty if the Constitution, which

¹Jac. 3/25.

²*Adresse aux français.*

Robespierre had so freely criticized, were never enacted, and if a faction, which its enactment would force into retirement, were to follow up its success of July 17th by establishing an unconstitutional oligarchy. The escape from this danger, he was convinced, lay not in republicanism, or any other new regime, but in the achievement, as soon as might be, of the Constitution, and the election of a Legislative Assembly.¹ In other words, it was Robespierre's sense of the intrigues and unworthiness of the present Assembly, and of the violently partisan spirit of the clubs, which made him long for a new start in the political world, rather as his feeling of over-work and exhaustion made him long for a holiday. He was indecisive, only because no decision, under the present conditions, seemed worth making. He failed to lead, because all roads seemed equally dangerous or distasteful. He fell back on the Constitution, because that, at any rate, would bring new men to the head of affairs—men chosen by the people, to whom *liberté* and *vertu* might once more seem divine.

VI

Robespierre's moderation during the July crisis did not save him from accusations of treason. A woman who was arrested on July 19 for 'incendiary expressions' against the Assembly, the municipality, and the National Guard, 'excepted Robespierre, Reubell, Pétion, Danton, and Marat.'² It was said that on July 17 Robespierre's portrait had hung on the altar of the country; that there had been found among Fréron's papers a plan to make him dictator; and that the mob had cried, '*Plus de Louis XVI: notre roi est Robespierre!*' Wild charges are commonly flung about at such a time; and it does not seem likely that, if there had been any substance in them, they would have been passed over by the Public Prosecutor in the inquiry which he held soon afterwards, and in which, whilst blaming Pétion and Robes-

¹*Discours sur l'inviolabilité royale.* 'The only thing to hope for at the moment is a new legislature, if you want to avoid a Long Parliament, proscriptions like those of Sylla, and a thousand incalculable horrors' (Mme Roland, July 22; R.F. 29/170).

²Tuetey, 2/2379; Mathiez, *Club des Cordeliers*, 137, 259; *Lettres de Bouchotte*.

pierre for a temporary flirtation with republicanism, he exculpated them from any more serious accusations.¹

It was obvious, too, that whilst Marat, Fréron, and Desmoulins were forced to suspend their papers, whilst Brune, Legendre, and Santerre went into hiding, and Danton took refuge in L'Aube, Troyes, Arcis, and finally in England,² Robespierre did no more than change his lodgings, and was able to keep up his daily attendances at the Assembly and the club. He was thus enabled to guide the Jacobins during the most critical time of their fortunes.

For the immediate result of the crisis was a split in the club, many of whose members withdrew, and founded a more moderate society in the neighbouring Feuillant convent.³ The new club, assuming the old name (*Société des amis de la constitution séante aux Feuillants*), claimed to be the rightful heir of the Jacobin tradition, and the legal owner of the club premises. This manœuvre closely resembled the foundation of the *Société de 1789* by Lafayette and his friends a year earlier: but the Duport-Lameth-Barnave party against whom that secession had been aimed were now themselves among the seceders.⁴ On July 18 Robespierre proposed to meet this move by sending an address to the Assembly, pointing out that the petition of July 16 was not illegal when it was drawn up, and that it had been withdrawn as soon as the decision of the Assembly made it so. 'We are not factionists,' the address declared; 'it is useless to attempt to attach the idea of crime to the love of liberty, that sublimest of all the virtues.' On the 24th he rejected an invitation to fuse the Jacobins with the Feuillants, with rather the same feelings as he had, two years before, rejected the insidious offers of the clergy to the Commons. On August 5 the club circulated to the affiliated societies an address he had drawn up, describing what had happened,

¹Aulard, 154; Mathiez, *Club des Cordeliers*, 358; A.R. 1/488.

²For Danton, v. A.R. 11/537; Mathiez, *Conspiration*, 130.

³For a list of the seceders, incomplete in the second part of the alphabet, v. *Brit. Mus. R.* 157.

⁴Michon, *Adrien Duport*, 82.

and justifying the refusal to reunite with the secessionists; and a later move for reunion, from the Jacobin side, was similarly suppressed.¹

By thus insisting upon the continuity and orthodoxy of the club, Robespierre preserved an organization which, in the following years, was to dominate the whole course of the Revolution. The ground which the Feuillants had won was gradually regained. The new club, helped by its proximity to the Manège, by the wealth of its members, and by its use of government facilities for propaganda purposes, had, indeed, at first great advantages over the old; and all Robespierre's popularity and political strategy were needed to counter its attack.² But by degrees he was successful. During the first fortnight of the schism nearly 400 provincial societies had declared for the Feuillants, and scarcely a dozen for the Jacobins. But by the third week in July, when the Jacobin propaganda began to overtake that of the Feuillants, petitions were coming in for a reunion of the two societies. Before the end of the summer many provincial clubs which had wavered between Pope and anti-Pope reaffirmed their allegiance to the old society. Prieur, Grégoire, Barère, Dubois de Crancé, Talleyrand, Rabaut Saint-Étienne, and Sieyès rejoined the Jacobins. By September the club membership had risen to 700 or 800; and soon 500 new clubs in the provinces were asking for affiliation. By December Feuillant meetings were being broken up by Jacobin demonstrators; and though a group of dissentients still met from time to time, in a variety of premises, up to the summer of 1792, the schism had no life in it.

Robespierre, who had presided almost alone over this reconstruction of the Jacobin forces, was now their leader in a fuller sense than ever before. When he entered the club on November 28, he was greeted with loud applause. Collot d'Herbois, who was in the chair, proposed 'that this member of the Constituent Assembly, rightly called "the In-

¹Jac. 3/36, 49, 64, 69, 93.

²By the end of August the Treasurer of the Jacobins reported a deficit of 2,000 *livres* (A.R. 7/37).

corruptible", should preside over the society'. The proposal was carried unanimously. Robespierre took the chair, and made a speech of thanks.¹ The honour was no less than his patient and cautious policy deserved. Indeed, so great was his repute at this time that the Bishop of Bourges, a venerable patriot of sixty-four, found nothing absurd in addressing him as the 'Immortal champion of popular rights', and saying that he would be proud to merit the name of *petit Robespierre*.²

VII

Meanwhile the Assembly, which had hoped to end its work in July, was condemned to another two months' session, and to a settlement of the difficult situation created by the king's flight and return. Here the effects of the July crisis were at once apparent. It was not the flight itself, or the proofs of the king's treachery, which had most alarmed the deputies, but the popular demonstrations, and the threat of republicanism. Instead of using the discredit of the crown to strengthen democratic control over the government, it was now their aim to revise the Constitution in the king's interest, and to diminish the rights of the people. Robespierre found himself struggling against a flood-tide of reaction. It was the situation of 1789 over again: except that the place of the court and the royalist party was now taken by the 'Triumvirate' and its Feuillant supporters; and that it no longer seemed to be a crime to conspire against the country, but to be over-jealous for its freedom.³ Anyhow, tired as he is, he must fight on.

Most of the new debates are on old issues. Thus, on August 10, we find him maintaining, as he had done more than a year before, that the sovereignty of the people is inalienable, and that the king cannot be the deputy, but only the delegate, of the nation. Thus, on August 11, he delivers a final attack upon his old enemy, the *marc d'argent*. Four days later he makes another of his attempts to whittle down the power of the Ministers, by opposing a motion to allow

¹Jac. 3/364.²Corresp. 98.³*Adresse aux français*.

them to speak in the House. On the 18th he once more expresses his doubts about the safety of the north-east frontier. On the 22nd an attempt to revive Sieyès' Censorship Law brings him to the tribune with a fresh exposition of his belief in the freedom of the Press.

The second of these speeches needs special attention; for it was one of Robespierre's best, and was circulated by the Cordeliers Club, as a charter of democracy, all over the country. It went over the old ground of the inconsistency between 'passive' citizenship and the Rights of Man; it pointed out the abuses to which the measure would lead, the class-privileges it would introduce, the stigma it would inflict on poor patriots, the premium it would place on money-making, and the encouragement it would give to oligarchical corruption. But, with all this, it showed a new sympathy with the case of the poor, about which Robespierre had learnt much during the days of July. The poor, it said, have a stake in the country, as well as the rich. 'Yes,' the poor man might say; 'the coarse clothes which cover my body, the humble roof beneath which I purchase the right to live in privacy and peace, the modest wages with which I support my wife and children—all this, I allow, does not amount to an estate, a castle, or an establishment; perhaps, on a scale of wealth and luxury, it is worth nothing at all. Nevertheless, viewed in a human light, it has a value: for it is something of my very own, no whit less sacred than the shining acres of the rich. Why! is not my liberty, my life, the claim of protection or redress for myself, and for those who are dear to me—is not the right to resist oppression, and to give free rein to all the faculties of my mind and my affections—is not each of these first and most precious gifts of nature entrusted, as yours are, to the custody of the laws?' The rich man, it may be argued, pays more to the state. Yes, but that is only because society allows him to be rich. And if we are to press the point, what is the origin of that excessive inequality of means which concentrates all the wealth of the country in a few hands? Is it not to be found in bad laws, bad govern-

ments, and (in a word) in all the vices of a corrupt society? Or, again, are the poor so unfit for a share of power? 'Do you honestly believe that a hard and laborious life engenders more vices than softness, luxury, and ambition? Have you less confidence in the honesty of our workmen and artisans, who, by your standard, will hardly ever rank as "active" citizens, than in that of the courtier and the tax-farmer, who, on the same reckoning, will stand 600 times as high? . . . For my own part, I bear witness to all those whom an instinctively noble and sensitive mind has made friends and lovers of equality, that in general there is no justice or goodness like that of the people, so long as they are not irritated by excessive oppression; that they are grateful for the smallest consideration shown to them, for the least good that is done to them, and even for the evil that is left undone; and that among the poor, and under an exterior that we should call coarse, are found honest and upright souls, and a good sense and energy that one might seek long and in vain among a class that looks down upon them.'

This speech is one that no biographer of Robespierre can lightly pass over. Its passages of genuine eloquence place him among the great orators. Its evident sympathy for the poor makes it impossible to conceive of him as a hard-hearted man, or to doubt the genuineness of his democratic professions. The sentences in which it deals with the problem of poverty are among the earliest and most important indications of his political philosophy. He is aware of the failure of society to equate merit and reward. He resents the unequal distribution of wealth. He desires better laws, better government, and a reformed society, in which the disabilities of poverty may disappear. He does not, indeed, say how this is to be brought about—whether by the universal suffrage that he desiderates, or by (what he is careful not to mention) a republican constitution. Later, perhaps, he will see his way more clearly. At present he is merely stating a profoundly difficult problem, and showing his desire to solve it.

But how many of his contemporaries went so far? How

many 'friends and lovers of equality' were ready to give political power to the poor? Can one be surprised that Robespierre's speech was regarded as a gospel of hope by the dispossessed and disfranchised classes, or that the *Société des indigens amis de la constitution* wrote to him, in almost idolatrous terms, 'we love thee, we revere thee, we bear thee in our heart'? Even the Assembly was shaken. But Thouret's tardy proposal to abolish the obnoxious *marc d'argent* was coupled with a fresh qualification for electors which robbed the concession of most of its value. A year later the revolution of August 10 swept all restrictions away.

VIII

These were old chains, which the reactionary party were trying to tighten. There were others which they sought to re-impose; and Robespierre found himself fighting against proposals to restore the king's body-guard (August 24), the royal prerogative of pardon (*droit de grâce*—September 2), and the title of 'Prince' to members of the royal family (August 25). This last was specially offensive to his democratic sense. If *Prince de Condé*, he argued, or *Prince de Conti*, why not *Count de Lameth*? 'Let us all have titles, or none.'

Charles Lameth, once Robespierre's friend, but now one of his bitterest enemies, soon found an opportunity to revenge this sneer. There had been a mutiny amongst the men of the Beauce regiment in garrison at Arras, and exceptionally severe methods of repression were proposed (August 28). The Lameths attempted to fasten upon Robespierre the responsibility for this outbreak, alleging that he had been in treasonable correspondence with the troops. In point of fact, he had kept himself informed of the whole affair through Guffroy, his old colleague of the Episcopal Court at Arras, and now *procureur-général-syndic* of the district; and it appears from their correspondence that the Jacobin Club at Arras, if not Guffroy himself, had played a mediating part between the government and the troops that

might easily lend itself to misrepresentation. Robespierre's own part in the business consisted in nothing more than procuring a hearing for the men's address to the Assembly, and the postponement of their trial.¹ As soon as he was free to leave Paris, he went to Arras to investigate the affair on the spot.²

The last stone of the constitutional arch was put in its place when the Assembly decided (August 30-1) that provision should be made for changing the Constitution in case of need, not by another revolution, but through a Constituent Assembly summoned for the purpose. In their fear of democratic reaction, and knowing that they were themselves going out of office, the deputies were anxious to make revision as difficult as possible: they therefore proposed an arrangement which would involve a ten years' moratorium for any constitutional change. Robespierre did not oppose this; but he urged that the Constituent Assembly should have power to review the conduct of the legislature; for 'the sovereignty of the nation means its ability to repress, when it wishes, any usurpation of power by the authorities it sets up'. Thus his last word before the final drafting of the Constitution was marked by that distrust of elected bodies which had been growing on him during the two and a half years of the National Assembly. Liberty was his creed; and everywhere he found it opposed by tyranny—the tyranny of feudalism, overthrown in 1789; the tyranny of the royal prerogative, destroyed bit by bit during 1790 and 1791; the tyranny of the constitutional reaction, which he hoped to see end with the dissolution of the Assembly; and now the tyranny of Parliament, which he feared would be inseparable from any form of representative government. A man who saw things so clearly was on the way to complete political disillusionment; and out of that strange things might come.

It remained only to submit the Constitution to the king. But this simple proceeding gave rise to a long and heated discussion, during which Robespierre delivered his last

¹Corresp. 86, 94, 96, 99-103.

²v. p. 1/187 f.

important speech in the Assembly (September 1). Louis, he said, will accept the Constitution with delight, for it gives him so much power—‘complete control of the executive; . . . the right to veto the actions of a series of national assemblies; the opportunity of influencing their proceedings through his ministers’ right of entry into the House; absolute authority over his agents, the administrative bodies; power to regulate the foreign policy of the nation; finally, the use of a huge army (*armées innombrables*)¹, and of a public Treasury, swollen with all the national property which has come into his hands—forty million *livres* for his personal expenditure.² Why! (exclaimed Robespierre) there is not a power in the state, but it pales before the king’s!’ Nevertheless, nothing is to be gained by delay: let Louis be presented with the Constitution as soon as possible. ‘The nation offers you (let us tell him) the most powerful throne in the universe: here are your title-deeds: do you accept it?’ He is free to decline, if he likes. No one will mind; and he will be as safe in Paris as anywhere else. But let us not give him an opportunity for intrigue (in the direction of a further revision of the Constitution) by letting him leave the capital. There is a tone of exaggeration and ill-temper in this speech which shows how the recent debates had frayed the speaker’s nerves. Yet it is worth remembering that Mirabeau had said essentially the same thing in his Notes to the court almost a year before.³ The Revolution had, indeed, retrenched many of the king’s prerogatives: but it had left powers enough for effective constitutional rule, had Louis known how to use them—the appointment of ministers, and their right of speech in the House; the suspensive veto; the Civil List; the nomination of administrators of the Treasury; a *garde constitutionnelle*; the appointment of a quarter of the junior officers, and all the higher commands

¹The regular army in 1791 numbered 110,000 infantry and 3,000 cavalry; the *gendarmerie*, 7,455 men; the *garde nationale* (in Paris alone), 31,000 men and 120 guns. Against these, if it came to a struggle, the king could only count on the 1,200 infantry and 600 cavalry of the *garde constitutionnelle*, and a small number of *Suisses*. (Lav. 1/182.) From this one can judge Robespierre’s exaggeration.

²The Civil List was 25,000 francs.

³*Correspondance entre le Comte de Mirabeau et le Comte de la Marck.*

in the army; and the initiative in declaring war. At the same time it had removed the most formidable obstacles in the way of the old autocracy—the privileged Orders, the Parlements, and provincialism; whilst it had lessened the danger of popular opposition by setting up a property franchise, excluding ‘passive’ citizens from the National Guard, limiting the freedom of the press, and suppressing the right of collective petition. If the inlets of royal power were less abundant than they had been, the outlets were less choked up; and a thinner stream of prerogative could run more freely.

IX

The Assembly was now near its end; but it did not have a quiet passing. The question of the colonies, last debated in May,¹ raised a fresh storm. The moderate concessions then made to the mulattoes and freed negroes had been obstructed in every possible way by the reactionary Colonial Committee. Now (September 5) came a deputation from the town of Brest asking for redress, and a violent reply by A. Lameth reopened the whole controversy. Robespierre declared that if any blame attached, it was to Lameth and Barnave, who had prevented the execution of the national decrees. At this the House was in an uproar, and there were demands for Robespierre’s arrest—*A l’Abbaye, à l’Abbaye, M. Robespierre!* When quiet was restored, Robespierre contented himself with asking for an inquiry; and there the matter rested. But three weeks later reaction had its way. Barnave proposed a decree (September 24) which abrogated the concessions of May 15, and put mulattoes as well as freed negroes once more at the mercy of the white settlers. Robespierre protested, in three speeches, in the name of humanity and justice, but could not prevent the Assembly from going back on its promises, and handing over the colonies to oppression and civil war.

It was apropos of this debate that the abbé de Salamon sketched, for the benefit of his friend Cardinal de Zelada, a

¹May 15 (v. 1/131 f).

vivid, if hostile, pen-portrait of Robespierre. 'This young lawyer', he wrote, 'is well-known for his emotional outbursts (*emportements*), and his republican enthusiasm. He learns nothing by experience: his mistakes only make him more stubborn and opinionative, and prove that he has limited gifts and a narrow outlook. The complete failure of a political programme which the laws are beginning to proscribe has only increased his passion, which now passes all bounds. He leaps upon darts and pikes like a lion wounded in the chase. Having no more arguments or evidence to adduce, he fights with insults and slanders: he rends and bites those whom he cannot persuade. Any deputy who does not think as he does is a traitor to the country'.¹

Nevertheless, looking back on the whole controversy, and putting aside the amenities of debate, to which others besides himself paid scant attention, Robespierre had little with which to reproach himself. Without Brissot's or Barnave's special concern in the colonial problem, he had taken it up as part of his campaign for humanity and freedom, had made himself, in his painstaking way, an authority on the subject, and had become the chief champion of a cause which was engaging the sympathy of humanitarians in other countries as well as his own. He had not been tactful. But tact is a virtue of majorities: in a minority it is taken as a sign of weakness. On the other hand, he had not been Utopian. He had seen that it was better to fight for a limited franchise (for the mulattoes and freed negroes) which had been promised, and might be granted, than for a complete one (including all black men) which there was no possibility of securing. And this attitude was justified by the sequel. For the revolt which soon broke out at St. Domingo was aggravated both by Barnave's refusal of rights to the freed blacks (who threw in their lot with the slaves), and by Brissot's premature campaign for emancipation; and the results of the Assembly's vacillating policy recoiled disastrously upon the situation in Paris.²

¹Correspondance, 327.

²Hardy in A.R. 12/357; Mathiez, *La Vie Chère*, 39.

SAVIOUR OF THE JACOBIN CLUB

Two final incidents. On September 17 an official sent to arrest Danton followed him into a building where the Paris electors were holding a meeting; for which 'breach of privilege' the president of the electoral assembly arrested him, and threw him into prison. Robespierre upheld his action, saying that the inviolability of the Assembly extended to any place where its members were elected—a bold doctrine, which the House would not accept. Finally, on September 29, Le Chapelier, that old enemy of the people, introduced a report from the Constitutional Committee, the upshot of which was an attempt to deprive Popular Societies—the chief means of Jacobin propaganda in the provinces—of the rights of affiliation and correspondence. Robespierre naturally attacked this proposal as contrary to the constitutional guarantees of free speech and free association. This time he won his point;¹ and it was a victory of immense moment to the Revolution.

Next day (September 30) the king appeared in the House, and renewed his oath to enforce respect for the Constitution. The work of the National Assembly was done.

The crowd which waited outside the House watched the dispersal of its members with little regret. But when Robespierre and Pétion appeared—the two men, as Desmoulins said, who embodied all that was good in the Assembly—there were cries of *Vive la Liberté! Vive Robespierre! Vive l'Incorruptible!* Their heads were crowned with oak-leaves, and an enthusiastic mob dragged their *fiacre* home through the streets.² Even Mme Roland, writing two years later, and from a Jacobin prison, has to admit that, at this period of his career, Robespierre was almost the only invincible (*inébranlable*) champion of democratic principle in the Assembly.³ And a play was put on at the Théâtre Molière in which Robespierre was represented on the stage,

¹The formal *projet de décret* was adopted; but the *instruction* necessary to give it effect was allowed to lie on the table. (Michon, *Adrien Duport*, 343.)

²*Révolutions de Paris*, No. 116, cp. a quotation in Lewes, 208.

³*Mem.* (ed. Barrière), 254.

confounding Rohan and Condé by his logic and his virtue.¹

X

Mme Roland played so large a part in the Revolution that her relations with Robespierre have a special importance. She and her husband had been in Paris, fulfilling a mission on behalf of the city of Lyon, from February 20 until the middle of September, 1791. They returned to their farm in time for the autumn vintage, and did not revisit the capital until December. Soon after her arrival at Clos de la Platière (September 27), Mme Roland wrote to Robespierre, lamenting the lack of real patriotism both in Paris and in the provinces. 'No one born with a soul,' she says, in her self-satisfied way, 'and who has kept it unstained, could look on Paris in these latter days, without lamenting the blindness of corrupt nations, and the abyss of evil from which it is difficult to rescue them'. It is, indeed (she thinks), the same everywhere: society is so badly ordered, that most men are unhappy. Here in Villefranche and Thézée (her district and parish) she meets many purely nominal patriots, 'men who like the Revolution because it has destroyed what was above them': they are monarchists to a man, and 'bridle at the mention of a Republic'. Lyon itself is 'devoted to the aristocracy: the elections are detestable, and the deputies are enemies of liberty, stock-jobbers with little or no reputation': there are no men of talent; and though 'the mass of the people never deceives itself very much or very long', yet electors, administrators, and representatives are all for sale. She ends by hoping that Robespierre will be glad to hear from her husband and herself, 'two beings whose souls were made to feel for' him, and who give their friendship only to the few who are worthy of it.² It is not known how Robespierre answered this effusion, or whether he acknowledged the writer's claim to spiritual affinity. But certainly his friendship with the Rolands did not long outlast their return to Paris at the end of the year.

¹Hamel, 1/561.

²Corresp. 104; ed. Perroud 2/384.

There has been occasion to refer, more than once, to a brochure which Robespierre composed in July, 1791, as a defence of his conduct during the weeks succeeding the flight to Varennes. This *Adresse de Maximilien Robespierre aux Français* is, as its title implies, more than an occasional pamphlet. It is Robespierre's apologia, in the full sense of the word—his confession of political faith; and it may well stand as *Finis* to the chapter of his life that ends with the Constituent Assembly.

'I am driven,' he begins, 'to defend at once my honour and my country';—they were, indeed, to him almost identical, and his principles were those of the Declaration of Rights. 'I proudly admit,' he goes on, 'that I have never considered this Declaration as an idle theory: I have regarded it as a body of judicial axioms at once universal, unchangeable, and imprescriptible, intended to be applied to all mankind. I have always thought that all my expressions of opinion, if not all the decrees of the National Assembly, ought to be logical expressions of the two principles which are the sum and essence of the Declaration—equality of rights, and the sovereignty of the nation. I have always held that equality of rights belongs to all members of the state; that the nation includes the working class (*la classe laborieuse*), and everyone, without distinction of rich or poor. I was conscious that the easiest victims of human injustice could not be excluded from the sympathy of those who were deputed to provide a remedy. I knew that I represented them as fully as any other class. And I will admit that I was bound to their cause by that imperious impulse which attracts us towards the under-dog (*les hommes faibles*); for it was this impulse, more than any reasoned knowledge of my duty, which had always claimed my sympathy for those in trouble.'

He has been accused, as a result of this partiality for the poor, of encouraging popular disorder. 'I can testify,' he replies, 'that this large and interesting class, hitherto called

"the people", is the natural friend and the indispensable champion of freedom. And why so? Because it is precisely this class which is neither corrupted by luxury, nor depraved by pride, nor carried away by ambition, nor troubled by those passions which are inimical to equality. I can affirm that, whenever the French people came together—at the capture of the Bastille, at the Federation of 1790, or at the time of the flight to Varennes—I have found it true to its character—generous, reasonable, magnanimous, and moderate.' It is unfair to reproach the people as a whole with the occasional crimes of individuals. As to the sovereignty of the people, he has always held it to be a fact, not a fiction. The Assembly cannot constitutionally do anything contrary to the rights of the sovereign people; and the nation ought to have constitutional means of enforcing its will upon its representatives. An absolutely independent legislature would be 'a moral and political monstrosity'. He is not afraid of monarchy, even of hereditary monarchy, so long as the people is given its proper place, and does not humiliate itself before its 'delegate', the King.

He ends by comparing his position with that of Socrates. 'Did the Athenian philosopher cause more offence to the great people, the ecclesiastics, the sophists, and the political charlatans, than I have? Have not I too spoken ill of false gods, and tried to introduce into our modern Athens the worship of virtue, justice, and equality? . . . There is nothing that cannot be done by money, by slander, by intrigue, or by bayonets. All these weapons are in the hands of my enemies; whilst I—a simple, weak, isolated individual—have nothing on my side but my courage, the justice of my cause, and the prayers of all good patriots'.

XII

The crisis of July, 1791, brought about an important change in Robespierre's domestic life. When the Jacobin Club broke up on the 17th he was in greater personal danger, perhaps, than ever before. It was 11 o'clock at

night. The members were greeted, as they came out, with threats and insults. Robespierre, arm-in-arm with Lapoype (a fellow-Jacobin), and Lecointe (in the uniform of the National Guard) had some difficulty in forcing his way through the crowd. Detachments of the municipal troops, fresh from the 'massacre' of the Champ de Mars, were still in the streets which lay between the rue Saint-Honoré and the rue Saintonge, a mile and a half away. Robespierre knew what he might expect from the men who had shot down his followers, and were imprisoning his friends. He asked Lecointe whether he knew of anyone near at hand who would put him up for the night. Lecointe suggested Maurice Duplay, a member of the club, who lived on the north side of the rue Saint-Honoré, only a few yards away; and Duplay hospitably took him in.¹ The original invitation was doubtless only for one night. But it was followed by a suggestion that Robespierre should give up his lodgings in the Marais, and take a room at the Duplays', recently vacated by Dom Gerle,² where he would be close to the Assembly and the club. Not long afterwards the plan was carried out.³

The house, No. 366, rue Saint-Honoré, which thus became Robespierre's home for the last three years of his life, is well known from a description by one of those who lived there; and this can be verified in outline by a visit to the present No. 398, which occupies the same site. The building formed three sides (north, west, and south) of a court backing onto the garden of a Conceptionist convent. The entrance, on the north side of the rue Saint-Honoré, was by an arched passage (*porte cochère*) between a jeweller's shop, named Rouilly, on one side, and an eating-house on the other: over it was a wooden eagle, like the figure-head of a ship.⁴ On the ground floor were a dining-

¹This is Fréron's account (Pap. inéd. 1/154). Mme Roland credits herself with an attempt to offer Robespierre an asylum, and to get Buzot to defend him at the Feuillants, and in the Assembly. (*Mem.*, ed. Barrière, 258.)

²The Jacobin Club list records his lodging there in 1789-90 (Alger, *Paris*, 440).

³On August 9 Robespierre still gave his address as, rue Saintonge (Mathiez, *Club des Cordeliers*, 332).

⁴A.H. 67/39.

room and drawing-room, facing onto the courtyard, and a study and kitchen looking out on the convent garden. In the courtyard itself were two sheds for Duplay's carpentering business, and a small garden, with flower beds belonging to the children. The first floor, approached either by an outside staircase on the left as one entered the yard, or by narrow steps—little better than a ladder—from the dining-room, contained, over the south front, facing the street, a room later occupied by Charlotte or Augustin Robespierre; four rooms on the west side—those of Jacques-Maurice, Simon, Maximilien Robespierre, and M. Duplay, and on the north side Mme Duplay's room, and (presumably) those of her three daughters. The house had no second floor; but there was a cellar under the street front, and a loft under the roof. Robespierre's low-ceilinged room was very simply furnished—a walnut bedstead, with blue and white damask curtains, made out of an old frock of Mme Duplay's, a small desk, some straw-seated chairs, and a cupboard to serve as a book-case. The only window looked onto the courtyard and the carpenters' sheds, so that the room was never free from the sounds of domestic work, or the noises of hammer and saw.¹

It is difficult not to dislike some of the characteristics and poses of 'the Incorruptible'; but here is a genuine bit of simplicity and hard living. How many authors or statesmen would be content to live and work in a tiny bed-sitting-room, overlooking a builder's yard, when they might have every comfort that success could give?

XIII

True, there were compensations. Robespierre had his books, his friends, and a refuge from people he did not wish to see.

¹v. Mme Lebas' account in Lamartine 2/194, and Stéphane-Pol, *Autour de Robespierre*. The upshot of the Hamel-Sardou controversy about the site (bibliography in Tourneux 4/25075-8) seems to be that the present No. 398 occupies the site and follows the main plan of the old building, and that the rooms on the first floor (including Robespierre's) approximate in position to those of 1791, but that the whole structure has been rebuilt; so that only a metaphysician can say whether the new room is the same as the old.

The shelves that contained the neat MSS. of his speeches also held a small library, collected partly from personal taste, but mainly (it may be presumed) for the routine of public work. An inventory made in 1794 mentions certain periodicals which he received as a member of the Convention; correspondence with foreign powers, ministers, and the Committee of Public Safety; official papers on the foreign trade of the Republic; several French, English, and Italian grammars; half a dozen dry-titled law-books; and some works on morals and history, such as Mably, Guicciardini, Fleury, and Fénelon. Philosophy is represented by de la Rochefoucauld, Francis Bacon, and Pope's *Essay on Man*. Lastly there are some pamphlets, including *Les crimes des reines de France*, and a number of treatises on mathematical subjects.¹

A man's library is some guide to his mind. Can we infer anything from this undeniably meagre list of books, in which law and mathematics bulk so large, whilst poetry is represented only by Pope, and fiction by Fénelon? It is worth while to compare Robespierre's library with Danton's. Some of Danton's books are the same: Guicciardini, Pope, and Fleury figure on both lists. But his is a collection of 700 volumes, in Latin, French, Italian, and English, including long sets of Rousseau, Raynal, Voltaire, Shakespeare, the *Spectator*, Buffon, and Condillac, as well as Ovid, Montaigne, Rabelais, Richardson, Boccaccio, Johnson's *Dictionary*, Adam Smith, Blackstone, and Robertson—a much richer fare. There are, of course, some good reasons for the difference. Danton was a comparatively rich man, Robespierre a poor one. Danton had a country house as well as a town lodging, Robespierre only one small room. Danton's public life was periodic, and left leisure for reading, whereas Robespierre's was continuous, and absorbed the whole of his energy. Add, that Danton could talk and write, as well as read, in English and Italian. Nevertheless, it seems fair to infer, from the books Robespierre kept by him, that he had rather deliberately turned

¹Full details in R.F. 21/533. The titles are all given in French; but the presence of Italian and English grammars suggests that Robespierre read Guicciardini, Bacon, and Pope in the original.

his back on the unregenerate tastes of his youth, and focussed his thought on a definite and narrow field. Is it of no significance that the classic prizeman of Louis-le-Grand kept no Latin authors on his shelves, and the Arras sonneteer only a single volume of verse? Is there no evidence, in the predominance of law, history, morals, and mathematics (though the last may have been a chance 'accession') of an intentional concentration of interests? May one not also connect the reduction of Robespierre's library with his development as an orator? His forensic speeches had been noted less for their thought than for their learning. His parliamentary orations are almost bare of the allusions to classical and philosophical authors by which he marked his superiority to the common *plaideur*: they are either practical expositions of passing topics, or elaborate essays on matters of principle, in which the writer is working out a position for himself; and that, not by induction from the opinions of others, but by deduction from a few ruling convictions. He has no need, for this purpose, of the shelves full of Raynal and Condillac, of Blackstone and Adam Smith, from which Danton never succeeded in drawing a political principle. He can even do without a copy of Rousseau.¹ He has Jean-Jacques' axioms in his head. He spins the web of his thought in tough geometrical gossamer out of his own body. The pattern repeats itself, and the shape does not always fit the space it has to cover; but it is undeniably his own. He used his books: he did not let his books use him.

Two additions are worth making. There is reason to believe that after her death Robespierre came into possession of a copy of *La Henriade*, which had belonged to Marie Antoinette; and that, among the papers taken over by Courtois at Thermidor, was a Bible which he had annotated and underlined.²

¹Lamartine, struck by this omission, or prompted by Mme Lebas, says that 'a volume of Rousseau or of Racine was generally open on his table'.

²A.R. 7/144, 2/592. The Bible was in Courtois' possession at the time of his death, but has since disappeared. A comparison with Saint-Just, also a lodger in Paris, is perhaps fairer. His library, like Robespierre's, included Republican periodicals and works on mathematics; but it was much richer in French literature; for besides Demosthenes, Cicero, Tasso in French translations, it included Rousseau, Bossuet, Pascal, Fénelon, Montesquieu, Mably, La Bruyère, and La Fontaine.

XIV

Besides his books, Robespierre had his friends.

The family circle at No. 366 in 1791 consisted of seven persons—Duplay and his wife, their three unmarried daughters, a son, and a nephew.

Maurice Duplay was a man of fifty-five, '5 ft. 6 ins. tall, with chestnut-coloured hair and eye-brows, oval face, high forehead, blue eyes, long nose, large mouth, and round chin'.¹ The son of a carpenter and builder near Vezelay, he had come to Paris, prospered in the family trade, and put his earnings into house-property, which now brought him in 15,000 livres (the equivalent of some £700) a year.² He was regarded, even by those who took exception to his political opinions, as 'a good father and a good husband, naturally kind and indulgent'; 'the most generous of men,' said Lebas, 'who spends all his life doing good'. To his hospitality all the Robespierres could bear witness: his honesty was proved when, after his imprisonment in 1794, he sold his house property to pay his debts. Already a Jacobin, in hope of social reform, his friendship for Robespierre soon took him more deeply into politics, and he became an elector, a commissioner for his Section, and a jurymen of the Revolutionary Tribunal. Tradition says that whenever he served on the tribunal he took his duties very seriously; so that when Robespierre asked him, one day, what he had been doing there, he replied, 'I have never tried to find out, Maximilien, what you do on the Committee of Public Safety'; and the other silently shook his hand.³

Twenty-five years ago he had married Françoise-Eléonore Vaugeois, the daughter of a fellow-builder employed on the king's work at Choisy. Middle-aged now, still bustling about the house in her blue-striped skirt and cotton

¹From his card of identity (Fleischmann, 100).

²He had leased No. 366 for nine years as from April 1, 1779; and again on July 1, 1783 (R.F. 36/376). He owned three houses in the rue de l'Arcade, rue de Luxembourg, and rue d'Angoulême (Hamel, 1/519).

³Stéfane-Pol, 75: 'improved' by Esquiros 2/388. But there was no mystery about the proceedings of the Tribunal.

stockings, but needing spectacles by the evening fire-side, Mme Duplay was a good mother and a good manager—though a little too much inclined, Charlotte Robespierre thought, to mother and manage others besides her own family. 'My mother was kind', says her youngest daughter, 'but very strict'; and Augustin Robespierre praised her for bringing up her daughters 'to be good house-keepers'.¹

There were four daughters—Eléonore, the eldest, named after her mother, and still at home; Sophie, already married to a royalist lawyer named Auzat, and living at Issoire;² Victoire; and Elisabeth, who two years later became the wife of Philippe Lebas. The plain, dark-haired Eléonore was evidently the 'serious one' of the sisters, sharing her father's politics and patriotism. 'She had the soul of a man,' Robespierre is reported to have said, 'and would have known how to die as well as she knew how to love'. Some historians have inferred that he was her lover. Souberbielle, who, as the family doctor, often dined with the Duplays, and was in the best possible position to know, strongly denied this. 'They were very fond of each other', he said, 'and they were engaged to be married, but nothing immodest passed between them. Without affectation or prudery, Robespierre kept out of, and even put a stop to, any kind of improper talk; and his morals were pure'.³ It may be that one day Maximilien took Eléonore's hand in his—the symbol of betrothal in Artois:⁴ but, in spite of the episode of the rue Saintonge, everything suggests that he was at this time too devoted to his career, and to his reputation, to commit any social indiscretion, even that of matrimony. Of the other daughters, Sophie and Victoire remain almost unknown; but Elisabeth's naïve, attractive character can be read in every line of her *Manuscrit*.⁵ Jacques-Maurice, the youngest child, was only thirteen in 1791, and still at school: a year later 'our young patriot', as Maximilien called him, went to

¹Stéfane-Pol, 106, 296.

²Afterwards (Thermidor, An. II) at Lille, where Victoire had stayed with her (A.R. 12/512).

³Poumiès de la Siboutie, *Souvenirs d'un médecin de Paris*, 27.

⁴Esquiros 2/216, perhaps on information derived from Mme Lebas.

⁵It is printed in Stéfane-Pol, 102.

the front with Lebas. The household was completed by Simon Duplay, an orphaned nephew of seventeen, to whom the Duplays had given a home, and who worked at the family business. He joined the army a year later, lost a leg at Valmy, and was afterwards known as 'wooden-legged Duplay'. In the warrant for his arrest at Thermidor he appears as 'Robespierre's secretary'; but he denied this, saying that Robespierre never had a secretary, and never employed anyone to copy out his speeches.¹ A similar claim was made by Villiers, and has been put forward in connexion with other names: but in point of fact, all the extant copies of Robespierre's speeches are in his own hand.²

Elisabeth's narrative shows on what friendly terms Robespierre lived with this household, and how happy he was there. 'Our best friend' (*notre bien bon ami*) she calls him, and says, 'we loved him more than a brother'. 'He took our part,' she adds, 'when, as sometimes happened, our mother found fault with us. I was very young, and rather silly; but he gave me such good advice that, young as I was, I enjoyed listening to him. If I was upset about anything, I used to tell him all about it. He was never censorious, but a friend, the best brother a girl could have, a model of virtue. He had a great regard for my father and mother, and we all loved him dearly'. When she fell in love with Lebas, and her parents objected to the marriage, it was Robespierre who befriended his *Babet*, and talked them round. When Guffroy made unwarrantable charges against her honour, it was he, again, who comforted her. 'Poor little girl,' he said, 'cheer up! It's nothing to worry about. Philip is very fond of you, and it makes him happy to have his Elisabeth. Then he took both our hands, and held them in his own, as though he were giving us his blessing'. On his side, Maximilien told Lebas 'what happiness it was to be living with people so

¹Charles Nodier, who knew him, doubted his qualifications for such work (*Souvenirs*, 291).

²For Villiers, v. p. 1/xxvi. Poumiès de la Siboutie, *Souvenirs* (336), calls Julien de Toulouse Robespierre's secretary. Another, Bégue, *dit* Magloire, made the claim on his tombstone, when he was buried in 1793 (A.H. 50/162). For Simon, v. Grasilier, *Simon Duplay*, and A.R. 6/418, 11/113.

honest, and so devoted to the cause of freedom', whilst Augustin said that his brother had come to regard the whole family—father, mother, and sisters—as his own.¹

Among the friends who from time to time joined this family circle were, in the early days, Pétion and the Lameths; occasionally the butcher Legendre, Merlin de Thionville, and Fouché; more often Taschereau, Desmoulins,² and Pio; and very frequently Lebas, Saint-Just, the painter David, Couthon,³ and Buonarroti. The list is Lamartine's, corrected by Mme Lebas, but it is not complete; other names can be added, with more or less certainty—Pierre Vaugeois, Mme Duplay's brother, and his friend Didier, a locksmith; Gravier, a distiller from Lyon, who lodged with Didier next door; Cietti, an Italian designer of wall-papers, with whom Duplay doubtless had business relations; Lohier, the Duplays' grocer; Nicolas, the government printer, whose press was at No. 355; Franche-le-Hausse and Souberbielle, both of whom claimed the title of 'family doctor'; a Corsican cobbler from Arras, named Calandini; Boisset, the *archiviste* of the Jacobin Club; the artist Gérard, whose portrait of Robespierre hung in the sitting-room;⁴ Félix Lepelletier, son of the deputy;⁵ and Dom Gerle, whose compromising friendship contributed to Robespierre's fall. In addition to these, Anthoine, the mayor of Metz, lodged with the Duplays in the summer of 1792; as did also a M. de Broc, a Norman gentleman, with his wife and two small children, under an assumed name, and venturing out only after dark.⁶ The list could doubtless be enlarged: it is sufficiently suggestive, as it stands, of the catholic hospitality of the Duplays, and of the variety of persons and interests with which Robespierre, in this quiet middle-class household, was brought into contact. It was a sheltered life, but it was not a narrow one.

¹Stéfane-Pol, 120 f.

²Fréron says Robespierre used to laugh at Desmoulins' witticisms till he cried. (Pap. inéd. 1/154.)

³Couthon seems to have lodged at the Duplays' for a time in the summer of 1792 (v. 1/292 n.).

⁴A.R. 1/244.

⁶Poumiès de la Siboutie, *Souvenirs*, 37.

⁵Hamel, 3/63.

It is possible to reconstruct, from the recollections of Mme Lebas and her family, several features of the Duplays' daily life¹—the evenings in the *cabinet d'étude* when Lebas sang from his favourite Italian composers, and Buonarroti played the piano,² or when Robespierre read aloud, in dramatic style, extracts from Racine or Corneille, before saying good night to the company, and returning to his work upstairs; or when they all took parts, and did their best to play up to the practised declamation of the professional speakers. There were other evenings—not more than two or three a year—when Robespierre would escort Mme Duplay and her daughters to a classical drama at the Théâtre Français; or even days when it was possible for the whole family to walk in the Champs Elysées, or make an excursion into country further afield. They chose, Elisabeth says, the quietest spots, where Maximilien, accompanied by herself, her mother, her sisters, young Jacques-Maurice, and the dog *Brount*³, liked to watch the Savoyard children dance, and would give them money—*il était si bon!* He was never so gay and happy as on these occasions, and it was generally on these evenings, when they got home, that he recited his favourite poetry. At other times he would go for solitary walks, accompanied only by his dog. But these recreations were exceptional. The Assembly commonly sat from 10 to 3 or 4, and the Jacobin Club from 6 (sometimes earlier) to 8 or 10. A hurried dinner at 5, when Mme Duplay took care not to forget Robespierre's liking for oranges and coffee⁴, allowed little time for relaxation.

¹Lamartine's account must be checked by Stéphane-Pol (97 f.); for, after submitting his MS. to Mme Lebas and her son, he failed to incorporate some of their suggestions (*ibid.* 53 f.).

²B. and R. 35/341. It may be only Hamel's guesswork that places the piano there.

³Esquiroz (2/458) knows all about Brount. It was perhaps on these excursions that Robespierre exercised his talent for drawing: at any rate, there exists a sketch of an old woman 'well and carefully drawn', signed with his name (A.R. 13/510).

⁴Guffroy, a hostile witness, makes out that Robespierre was unduly fond of oranges and jam—he would eat *un pot de confitures fines* at a sitting, and take a glass or two of old wine before going to make a speech at the Jacobins. (A.R. 4/110.) Fréron, another enemy, agrees about the oranges, and says at one time he drank wine and liqueurs immoderately, but took nothing but water during the last months of his life (Pap. inéd. 1/154).

The constant business of reading reports, writing letters, composing speeches, and interviewing petitioners or politicians, made up a day's work of the most exacting kind—and one which repeated itself interminably; for there were no Parliamentary recesses, no politicians' week-ends, and no party Whips to tell a deputy when he need be in his place to vote, and when he might safely stay away. Robespierre's was a regular, temperate, and laborious life.

There came a time when Robespierre's connexion with the Duplay household was made a cause of offence; when his sister accused them of keeping him to themselves, and poisoning his mind against her; or when his enemies said that they isolated him from his followers, and flattered his conceit. But in 1791, at any rate, when party bitterness knew some limits, and men still felt some stirring of the ideals of 1789, Robespierre could hardly have done better, either for himself, or for the cause that he had at heart. His hosts were simple honest patriots of the lower middle class—the backbone of the Revolution; and the house in the rue Saint-Honoré was a perfect setting for the public life of 'the Incorruptible'. To Maximilien himself, for whom family life had hitherto such unhappy associations, the sane and friendly atmosphere of the Duplay household was just the corrective needed for a spirit in danger of introspection and embitterment.¹

XVI

He had perhaps begun to feel this, when, some two months after his move from the rue Saintonge, the Constituent Assembly came to an end, and he was free, for the first time for many years, to take a real holiday. It would be pleasant to be able to settle down, uninterrupted, to the spell of thinking and writing that he had promised himself. But there was one thing to be done first: he must visit

¹It is difficult to separate fact from fiction in the accounts of Robespierre's daily life: e.g., the story of the Savoyard children may have been transferred from Rousseau's *Réveries d'un promeneur solitaire*. (Lenôtre, 242.) Did he drive out to Arthur's estate at Bercy, catch a fine pike in the fish-pond, and express compassion for the fish's death-struggles? Did he dine at Issy with Couthon, and walk in the Princesse de Chimay's park? Did he frequent the forest of Montmorency, and inhabit for a time Rousseau's *Hermitage*? (A.R. 3/386.) Not, at any rate, in 1791.

Arras. There were many reasons for this. The Artois people were his countrymen and his constituents; and he had not been among them for more than two years. Arras was his home; and there were definite questions to be settled there: the differences between the Popular Society and the Council-General of the Commune during the crisis of July; the affairs of the local Jacobin Club, which, after making him an honorary member in June, had in July sided with the Feuillants, and slandered him;¹ the 'mutiny' of the Beauce regiment, to be looked into with Guffroy;² the political situation, which he hoped to discuss with his friend Buissart;³ and the future of his brother and sister, who, even now that Augustin was an *administrateur du Département*, and had returned to Arras to share his sister's expenses, found it none too easy to live in the house in the rue des Rapporteurs.⁴ He accordingly wrote to Charlotte saying that he was coming home, and fixing the day of his arrival; and he arranged to travel with Pétion, who was going in the same direction.⁵ However private the intention of the journey (and Charlotte is at pains to stress this) it soon turned into a triumphal progress. At Bapaume, where his brother and sister and Mme Buissart were waiting for him with a carriage, to cover the last stage to Arras, two detachments of National Guards that happened to be passing through joined with the local patriots in presenting him with a civic crown, and entertaining him at a banquet; nor were the District and Municipal authorities too proud to pay him an official visit. From Bapaume onwards his carriage was escorted by officers of the National Guard, and a fresh detachment from Arras. 'At Arras itself (such is Robespierre's own account of it) the people received me with demonstrations of affection which I cannot describe, and the thought of which still warms my heart. Every possible means was used to express it. A crowd of citizens

¹Corresp. 84, 89.

²v. 1/169.

³Corresp. 76.

⁴Augustin must have returned to Arras some time between March and July.

⁵Charlotte's narrative, to do more honour to her brother, omits all mention of Pétion. Was he going to England? Mercier, *New Picture of Paris*, 1/149, says he returned from there to be Mayor of Paris.

had come out of the town to meet me. They offered a civic crown, not only to me, but to Pétion also, and in their cheers the name of my friend and companion in arms was often mingled with my own. I was surprised to see the houses of my enemies, and of the aristocrats (here at Arras they are Feuillants or Ministerialists; the rest have emigrated) lit up along the route of the procession: I could only attribute it to their respect for popular feeling'. He was, indeed, told that the municipality had opposed these demonstrations. 'If it had been the king himself,' they naïvely remarked, 'it would have been excessive: you did nothing of the kind for us, when we took office': and as soon as Robespierre reached home, they sent out constables to extinguish the illuminations. But that did not end the rejoicings: for next day the National Guards danced in the *Place*, and sang patriotic songs, and marched to Robespierre's house, 'making the air resound with acclamations extremely disagreeable to a Feuillant ear'.¹

Written under different circumstances, or to a different correspondent, this letter might be thought complacent and conceited. But that would be to misinterpret it. Robespierre is delighted at his reception; but so he is at Pétion's: and why? Because it means popular approval of the policy for which they both stand—that of opposition to the reactionary royalism of the Feuillants; because it shows that the National Guard, which in July had been the tool of that party, is now ready to take the side of the people—a remarkable instance of the change of public opinion; and because it proves that the old ardour of 1789, which recent events had tended to extinguish in the capital, still burns brightly in the provinces. Besides, Robespierre is writing to a discreet man, who shares his views, and who will be delighted to hear of his friend's great doings in the country.

XVII

How did Robespierre spend the six weeks that elapsed between his arrival at Arras and his return to Paris? His

¹To Duplay, October 16 (Corresp. 105).

sister says that he did not stay long in the rue des Rapporteurs, but went to stay not far away, in the country, 'in order to enjoy the pleasures of repose' and meditation. When he returned, he went to see an old friend who lived a few miles away, but found him so changed and cold that he came back deeply wounded, and never visited him again.¹ Early in November he paid a visit to Béthune, perhaps to see his friend Mlle Dehay. Once more, a private journey became a public triumph. He was met some miles short of the town by a deputation of the citizens, and conveyed for the rest of the way in a carriage hung with flowers and oak-leaves. He entered the town escorted by mounted citizens, the National Guard, and a trumpeter of the local cavalry regiment. After a midday meal, he attended a Jacobin meeting in the Town Hall, at which women's hands placed a civic crown on his head; and the day ended with a public banquet. Robespierre slept three nights at the *Lion d'Or*, whose landlord declared that, if he had only one bed, and the choice lay between Robespierre and the king himself, he would give it to Robespierre.

It is known that he also visited Lille; for at a meeting of the local *Société populaire*, on November 24, 'the Incorruptible' was placed on the President's right, delivered a discourse, which was much applauded, and was given the *accolade*, and a civic crown. Here, too, there had been difficulties between citizens and soldiers: but when the commandant apologized for their behaviour, Robespierre promised to take up their case, recommending him and his men 'always to fix their eyes on God, the law, and the fatherland'.²

But Arras must have been the main centre of Robespierre's interests; and here there seem to have been three matters which made a special impression upon his mind.

One was the defence of the frontier. What he saw at Arras, Lille, and Bapaume confirmed the suspicions he had already formed in connexion with the Porentruy and Thion-

¹Vellay suggests that this was Dubois de Fosseux.

²A.R. 12/65.

ville incidents.¹ The personnel of the National Guard, he told Duplay, was excellent; but their organization, owing to the incompetence or ill-will of the municipal authorities, was as bad as could be. They might dance in the *Place* at Arras; they might incite the country people against the 'refractory' clergy; but what use would they be, if the country were attacked by a foreign army? Robespierre returned from Arras determined to put national defence in the front of his programme, and to work against war, until the country was fit to defend itself.

Another matter on which his visit to Arras threw new light was emigration. He had hitherto maintained that it was the right of any individual to leave the country, if he would. But the sight of the inns on all the northern roads filled with refugees, and the evidence of the inn-keepers as to the number of people who, for some time past, had been crossing the frontier, led him to wonder whether, here too, liberty might not be abused, to the danger of the state.

XVIII

A third matter, to judge from the place it holds in his correspondence, exercised him even more. Hitherto, when questions of church policy came up, Maximilien, with his seminarist training, and his clerical friends, had been inclined to snub the anti-clerical outbursts of his brother Augustin, and of the Arras Jacobins. But the ecclesiastical atmosphere of his native place, which had grown remote and rather unreal during his absence in the capital, now struck a sudden chill to his Parisian mind. Arras itself, with a cathedral establishment, eleven parish churches, nine monasteries, and thirteen nunneries, was a battle-ground of clericals and anti-clericals. Three months before Robespierre's visit, the anti-clerical party had induced the departmental Directory to prohibit, for a time, public attendance at the nunnery chapels, where it was alleged that masses were said by 'refractory' priests; and a petition for the

¹v. 1/190.

expulsion of all 'non-jurors', signed amongst others by Augustin Robespierre, had been forwarded to the Assembly.¹ Opinion on both sides was deeply moved; and the clericals had recourse to time-honoured methods to work up feeling against their persecutors. They had gone so far, it was said, as to carry through the streets a Calvary, in which there were represented, by the side of the Penitent Thief, Maury, Cazalès, and other royalist deputies, and by the side of the Impenitent reviler of Christ, the revolutionary members of the Assembly, holding spear, vinegar, and *absinthe*, and crying, 'If thou art the Son of God, perform a miracle, and meet the deficit!'² Robespierre's arrival at Arras coincided with a fresh outbreak of propaganda. A 'miracle', he tells Duplay, 'has just been worked at the Calvary chapel. . . . While a refractory priest was saying mass, a lame man threw down his crutches, and walked'. His first reaction is that of a tolerant sceptic. He notes that the *dévo*t *sanbéd*rin of the clergy has, as a result of the miracle, vastly increased its sale of votive candles; and he chaffingly remarks, 'I don't intend to stay long in this Holy Land; I am not worthy of it'.³ But he soon sheds this Voltairian detachment. He dines with his friend Joseph Lebon in the *presbytère* at Neuville-Vitasse, and hears all about his quarrel with his predecessor and rival, the non-juror Lebas; the parish clerk's account was that 'they talked of nothing but reforms and revolutions'.⁴ Thus he began to see in the refractory priests and their followers the centre of a counter-revolutionary movement, and realized how little this danger was appreciated in Paris—always a world of its own, out of touch with the provinces. It was not for an ex-deputy, a politician on holiday, to publish alarmist opinions; but he expressed his fears in a private letter to a friend, which subsequently got into the press. 'Public affairs,' he wrote, 'are in such a deplorable condition that it is more difficult every day to do one's duty. . . . The orators of the National Assembly have gone all wrong on the question of the clergy, almost to a

¹Paris, *Lebon*, 17.

²Desmoulins in *Révolutions de France et de Brabant*, No. 23.

³Corresp. 105.

⁴Paris, *Lebon*, 19, 39.

man. They have delivered learned orations on toleration and freedom of worship. They have envisaged merely as a question of philosophy and religion what is in reality a question of politics and the Revolution. They have failed to see that, every time an aristocratic priest makes a convert, he turns him into a fresh enemy of the Revolution. . . . I realize how little we in Paris understand the state of public opinion, or the power of the priests. I am convinced that by their own efforts alone they could restore the Monarchy, and that the court has only to leave them untouched, in the certainty that it will soon enjoy the fruit of their intrigues'.¹

This was a remarkable declaration on the part of one hitherto reputed a friend of the clergy. The temptation to make political capital out of it, especially at a time when the new Assembly was discussing the clerical oath, and the treatment of the non-jurors, was overwhelming. The recipient of the letter immediately showed it to Gorsas, the editor of the *Courrier des 83 départements*, and extracts from it appeared within three days in that paper, and in another.² Robespierre at once wrote to protest. He did not deny his authorship, or the essential fairness of the extracts; but he objected to the publication of what was never intended to be more than a private expression of opinion.³ The protest produced editorial notes, but no apologies. The *Courrier* in fact said that the person who had communicated the letter 'took a pride in having done a service to the country'.

Robespierre's opinions had, indeed, become a matter of national importance; and his visit to Arras was to bear fruit in the Jacobin church policy of the next three years, with its paradoxical mingling of official toleration and unofficial persecution. He could not have lived long in Paris without being aware of the reaction in the Assembly,

¹Corresp. 106.

²The letter was dated November 4; it appeared in the *Courrier* and the *Annales patriotiques* on November 7.

³Corresp. 107, 108. To the editor of the *Annales* he says the printed version is *assez inexacte*, but to the editor of the *Courrier* he admits that it *n'eut pas altéré nécessairement l'esprit et le sens de la lettre*. This excludes Hamel's view that the letter was written by Condorcet. Robespierre also sent an explanation to the Jacobin Club, which was read there on November 16 (Jac. 3/248).

and the danger of political counter-revolution. But he had been too little in touch with his constituency, and too familiar with his brother's lack of judgment, to realize the danger of clerical intrigues in the provinces. He now saw that the movement against the clerical oath was becoming an ecclesiastical counter-revolution; and the discovery gave him a new feeling of insecurity, and a readiness to harbour suspicion, which embittered his outlook. He had lost many illusions in Paris: when he returned there, he left another behind him at Arras.

CHAPTER VII

THE OPPONENT OF WAR (NOVEMBER, 1791—APRIL, 1792)

I

THE cheers which greeted Robespierre's reappearance at the Jacobin Club on November 28 were more than a tribute to the man who had saved the society during the crisis of the summer and autumn. They were a sign, for those who could read it, that the ruling power in the country, which had passed two years ago from the king to the Assembly, was passing again from the Assembly to the clubs and sections of Paris. Robespierre himself had been the chief agent of this change, when, disillusioned with his colleagues, he had proposed the resolution by which they excluded themselves from the new legislature. He was, at first sight, pleased with the result. 'Unlike many people,' he told Buissart, 'I consider the new National Assembly very superior to that which preceded it'.¹

There was, indeed, plenty of ability among the new deputies. But circumstances decreed that much of it should run to waste. The events of July had given an unexpected and difficult turn to the political situation. The electors, if they troubled to vote at all,² did so under the influence of the anti-republican reaction that followed the 'massacre' of July 17, and returned representatives predominantly conservative, pledged to uphold the constitutional settlement of September. Their part was in any case an inactive and undistinguished one, compared to that of their predecessors: for they had not to create, but only to carry out a Constitution; and to do so under the critical eyes of the ex-Constituents, the veterans of the Revolution, who to so great an extent controlled the press, the populace, and the purse-strings of Paris. But the position was even worse than this;

¹Corresp. 110.

²v. Taine's figures in Deslandres, 1/139.

for few of those who had helped to make the Constitution any longer believed in it; and the events of the summer had not only led to an *impasse* in the relations between the nation and the king which could be ended only by republicanism, but had also created a feud between the middle-class monarchists and the lower-class republicans which was likely to render any regime unstable and transitory.

Under these circumstances it must have been clear to any shrewd observer—and none was shrewder than Robespierre—that the Assembly was no longer the main road to a political career, and that the real clash of parties and policies, in which personal reputations were to be lost or won, would take place at the Jacobin Club. Here, four nights a week, after the House had risen, the tired deputies would meet again, to face critics fresh from the popular society, the café, or the editor's chair. Here every suspicion could be aired, every rumour reported, every grievance revived, with a republican frankness which was still a little resented in the Assembly, but which was appropriate to a society that prided itself on responding to the lightest breath of public opinion. Here a piece of gossip from the street corner, or a private letter from the provinces, was enough material for a denunciation. Here was the Capitol, and here also was the Tarpeian rock of the Revolution.

In this heady atmosphere Robespierre's talents flourished. As the champion of liberal ideals, as the heir of Mirabeau, as the saviour of the club, and as the chief object of reactionary hatred, he stood almost alone. No one had a longer experience of parliamentary history, procedure, or tactics. No one had a stronger sense of party differences, or a keener scent for intrigue. The leadership which, by sheer persistence, he had forced the society to recognize, was now his by right. The easy applause of the Jacobins gave him new confidence in his powers, and lent fresh authority to his words. The normal danger of such a position was demagoguery; but from this he was saved, for some time, by his opposition to the popular war policy. Meanwhile, he studied the personalities

of political life; mastered the methods of 'clubocracy'; and measured the possibilities of 'direct action' in a state which was rapidly growing tired of representative government. Thus, when events justified his prevision, and the Jacobins came into power on the wave of reaction against a mis-managed war, Robespierre once more stood out as the Infallible, the Incorruptible, the Indispensable; never quite a leader of revolutionists, but a unique embodiment of the Revolution.

It is upon the Jacobin Club, therefore, that attention must be fixed during the winter of 1791-2; and Robespierre's frequent interventions in its debates, together with the increased correspondence and journalism which his greater leisure now allowed, will be the principal sources of information.

II

A good deal of Robespierre's attention was given, during these months, to the organization of Jacobinism. The experiences of the summer had shown that there were three ways in which the club could capture the power that was slipping out of the hands of the Assembly—by raising the standard of membership, by educating the people, and by influencing the elections.

As to membership, there might have been no question, but for the events of July. Originally the only qualification for admission to the club had been a personal recommendation, and the payment of a subscription. Jacobin societies in the provinces had recruited themselves from the people somewhat vaguely described as *patriotes*. Most of them came from the middle and lower *bourgeoisie*—from the people who owned a little property, paid taxes, and held liberal opinions, and from the intelligent minority which had always supported the *salons*, the Masonic lodges, and the literary or political societies in provincial towns.¹ Up to June, 1791, these Societies of 'Friends of the Constitution' followed the main advances of the Revolution, without

¹ v. Cardenal, *La province pendant la Révolution*.

any great need either to formulate their faith, or to investigate the character of their members. There were differences of opinion, no doubt, over the Church question; but these cut across the political divisions; and the king's flight discounted his stand against the clerical oath. But the events of July—the restoration of a discredited king, the reactionary amendments to an already undemocratic Constitution, and the proscription of republicanism—struck at the heart of Jacobinism. All over the country there were secessions from the Friends of the Constitution like that which formed the *Feuillants* in Paris. Everywhere the more radical patriots were for a time under a cloud. It was therefore natural that, when the weather cleared, and the storm passed on over the constitutionalists, those Jacobins who had stood firm during the crisis should try to define their position, and to refuse the readmission of back-sliders, or the recruitment of half-hearted believers. The winter of 1791-2 saw the beginnings of a Jacobin 'purge', or Counter-reformation, whose fruits were to be the August revolution, and the *Montagnard* dictatorship of 1793-4.¹ If Robespierre played a leading part in this unpleasing *épuration* of his followers, it need not be put down to personal malignity: it was due to the conviction, forced upon him by the events of the summer, that the patriots must either close their ranks, or be overwhelmed by the forces of counter-revolution.

Within a few weeks of his return to the club, Robespierre had declared this policy, and carried the first instalment of it. He had secured the adjournment of two applications for membership—one indefinitely (December 6). He had reiterated (December 25) his objection to any reunion with the *Feuillant* secession. He had won a decisive victory for the policy of the 'purge' (January 6), when he combated the proposal that ex-members of the *Feuillants* might be nominated for membership, and secured its unanimous rejection.

The campaign was soon extended to the provinces. At Strasbourg the popular party had broken up under a com-

¹The Tridentine Decrees of the movement were embodied in a *Projet de règlement pour le société* (1791) (Brit. Mus. F.R. 366. Cp. a form of application for membership, *ibid.* F. 349 (20)).

bined attack by the Mayor (one Dietrich, a secessionist), the *procureur-syndic* (de Broglie), and the military. Robespierre, informed of every change in the situation by Simond, the corresponding secretary of the local Jacobins, insisted that the mother-club at Paris should come to the rescue. Dietrich was marked down for ultimate destruction; and Robespierre received a civic crown and a congratulatory address from the grateful Strasbourgers.¹

Meanwhile, the Paris club was purging its ranks with increasing thoroughness. It was agreed, always at Robespierre's suggestion, that there should be no further admissions to membership until new rules were drawn up; that any member nominating an *ex-émigré* should be expelled from the club; and that a list of the members should be compiled and posted, showing their present professions, and the positions they had held before the Revolution; for, now that the country was upon the eve of war, both at home and abroad, it was not enough that a man should profess himself, or even behave himself as a patriot; his past conduct must be above suspicion, and his present status must conform to type.

This 'purge' was bloodless; the time had not yet come when the club door led to the guillotine. But the inquisitorial way in which it was carried out made the remedy worse than the disease. An anti-Jacobin pamphlet of August, 1791, spoke of Robespierre's 'perpetual denunciations, protestations, and slanders'. Another suggested that he had resigned the post of Public Prosecutor because he preferred to be Private Denouncer at the Jacobins.² The case for denunciation, and the distinction between the suspicion which justifies it, and the proof required for conviction at law, were expounded with great clarity in a pamphlet of which Robespierre himself may have been the author.³ Besides, as an anonymous denouncer frankly remarks in a letter to Robespierre, if he were summoned to give evidence in a court of law, he would lose his oppor-

¹Corresp. 113, 114, 118; A.R. 12/389.

³Brit. Mus. F. 347 (23).

²Brit. Mus. F.R. 366.

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tunity for spying; whilst he would soon cease to reveal 'truths', if he had to substantiate them.¹ Nor was there any lack of material. The counter-revolution had infinite ramifications, and most of them led back, sooner or later, to Paris. The eighteenth century treasured no traditions of political purity, and there were few French statesmen who found it easy to refuse a bribe. So the unpleasant business went on.

III

Along with the purging of the Jacobin clubs went an attempt to educate the country in the principles of Jacobinism. It had always been the policy of the Paris society to keep the affiliated clubs in the provinces informed about crucial events in the capital, and to circulate, from time to time, propagandist literature. In 1791 there was a further extension of this plan, when an extra subscription of twelve *livres* a year was collected from some 700 members, to finance Tallien's *L'Ami des citoyens*, as a counterblast to the Feuillant *Chant du Coq*.² Again, one of Robespierre's last acts before going away for his holiday at Arras had been to sign a letter sent out by the society, enclosing the prospectus of an *école centrale d'expériences*, a kind of training school for Jacobin agents, to be established in Paris. The scheme included courses of lectures on morality and the Constitution, which were to be printed, and circulated to patriotic schools and societies, 'where they will be read aloud to specially summoned meetings of all the local inhabitants'. Robespierre himself was one of the twelve lecturers nominated, and one of the six who seem actually to have undertaken 'the noble work of instructing and catechizing children on the Constitution'. Robespierre's experience of school lecturing at Arras helped him now. One could, indeed, well spare some of his political speeches, if one had the Sunday morning talks he gave to the *Société fraternelle du faubourg Saint-Antoine*.³

A third way in which the Jacobins hoped to secure power

¹Pap. inéd., 1/125.

²A.R. 7/37.

³Jac. 3/267, 418.

was by influencing the popular elections, which were by now so important a part of revolutionary routine. The length of time over which the simplest election might extend, whilst it made it difficult for poor patriots to vote, gave their leaders ample opportunity for lobbying. Robespierre, it may be suspected, had a liking for this kind of work: it was not a pure accident that he was accused of intriguing at the elections both to the States-General in 1789, and to the Convention in 1792. But, so far as the evidence goes, he does not seem to have done anything dishonest. For one thing, he was singularly unsuccessful in pushing his own candidatures. Few prominent persons of that time can have missed election more often than he did.¹ Nor was he much more successful with his friends. He had nothing to do with Pétion's election to the mayoralty of Paris. He specially forbore to press Danton's claims as *substitut procureur* of the commune (December 4). He opposed the suggestion of a Jacobin 'ticket' for elections to the criminal tribunal (December 27); and his friend Anthoine had to be content with a minor appointment (February 27). He was, indeed, anxious that the club should do nothing to excuse another attack by the Constitutionalists. Everything was to be gained, now that public opinion was coming round to their side, by a waiting policy. Accordingly all that was usually done, at election times, was to adjourn the club, so that those who were qualified to vote might do so, and those who were not might canvass for Jacobin candidates: indeed, in view of the small polls usually cast, this was probably effective enough.

It was doubtless the same caution which dictated Robespierre's treatment of the provocative petition presented by the departmental Directory (which included Talleyrand, Desmeuniers, and his old enemy Beaumetz), asking the king to veto the decree of November 29 against the refractory priests.² Their opinions might be detestable, but their procedure was not illegal; and it would be unwise for the

¹e.g. February 15 and November 10, 1791 (*procureur-général-syndic*), June 9 and December 29 (criminal tribunal).

²The king did so on December 9.

club to issue any counter-petition. 'We want our enemies to realize', he said, 'that the public does not echo the opinions of the society, but the society those of the public. We want them to realize that the club is nothing but a section of the general public, and that all its energy comes from the fact that the capital is deeply imbued with revolutionary principles—that capital in whose defence it is ready to sacrifice all that it holds dearest in the world'. This declaration was of a piece with Robespierre's theory of national government,¹ and deserves attention as an essential part not merely of his party tactics, but also of his political philosophy.

IV

During the five months that lay between his return to Paris (November 28, 1791) and the declaration of war against Austria (April 20, 1792), Robespierre intervened in the debates at the Jacobin Club some sixty-five times, that is, at most of the four meetings a week. It would be possible to classify some of these speeches by subject-matter; but the whole series of debates is so bound together, in chronological sequence, by a single idea, that it is best, at the risk of some over-complexity, to follow the order of events. That single idea was war.

The keynote of everything that followed was given by Robespierre himself on the very day of his reappearance at the Jacobins. Dubois-Crancé, a keen and able patriot, read the draft of a decree that he proposed to move in the Assembly, calling upon the king to disperse the hostile mobilization of *émigrés* on the frontier. After several other members had spoken, Robespierre gave his opinion. What was it? Not a warning against war; not any expression of doubt as to the *casus belli*—the emigrants; but a demand for even stronger measures. The Assembly should not merely ask the king to act, but dictate his action: instead of an indirect threat to the puny Electors of Mayence, Trèves, and Cologne, it should deliver an ultimatum to the Emperor

¹e.g. November 28.

himself. 'The National Assembly and the Executive Power,' he declared, 'ought to treat their foreign foes as a free people treats despots. They ought to imitate the Roman who, when commissioned in the name of the Senate to present an ultimatum to an enemy of the Republic, insisted upon an immediate reply. They ought to draw round Leopold the circle that Pompilius drew round Mithridates.' Robespierre did not persist in this bellicose mood; but at the moment this much is clear: that he is not a pacifist—for he may disapprove of a particular war, but he will not disapprove of war as such; and that he believes it is the right of the Assembly, as the people's representative, to impose its will upon the Crown. He is for a national foreign policy, and, if need be, for a national war. It is likely enough that, having only just returned to Paris, Robespierre did not as yet realize all the intrigues that lay behind the war policy of the court, or of the dominant party in the House. In proportion as he sounded them, he grew more cautious. But he never wavered from the principles that he laid down on November 28.¹

On December 9 and 12, Carra, taking advantage of the rumour that Louis was intriguing with Leopold for the support of the throne,² called for a mobilization of the national forces, and a declaration of war. Robespierre, after throwing doubt on the Emperor's enthusiasm for his brother-in-law's cause, pointed out that the first result of a declaration of war would be to put all the armed forces of the country into the hands of the king, and to leave Paris at the mercy of any party that wanted to end the revolution, and establish a despotism.³

These fears of a royalist plot seemed likely to be realized

¹Jaurès (3/136) thinks this speech insincere. Michon's solution (A.R. 12/357) is much as above, but he obscures the importance of the speech. Cp. the speech of April 20.

²Louis had in fact written to the Emperor, the King of Prussia, the Empress of Russia, and the Kings of Sweden and Spain, suggesting a conference of the Powers, backed by a threat of armed intervention, as the best way of saving his throne. (Lav. 1/337.)

³In an address of the Jacobins to the affiliated societies, two days before (December 10), Robespierre had denounced such a plot on the part of the Court. (Mathiez, 143.)

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a few days later (December 14), when the king and the Minister of War came to the Assembly, Louis to say that Leopold had promised his good offices to secure the dispersal of the emigrant forces in the Electorate of Trèves, and Narbonne to announce that within a month's time 150,000 French troops would be mobilized upon the frontier. When Biauzat at the club, the same evening, professed belief in the king's honesty, and proposed that the subject should be no further debated, Robespierre refused to be silenced. 'I shall discuss the question of peace or war,' he said, 'as my conscience dictates, and because liberty is the ruling passion of my life.'¹

As the war fever mounted, he grew increasingly cold and careful. On December 16, Brissot, who passed for the leader of the Girondist majority in the House, and for one of the ablest speakers and writers in the club, announced the result of six months' meditation in an elaborate and eloquent plea for war. Two days later, after a crowded and exciting meeting, during which the English, French, and American flags were set up in the hall, and a *jeune citoyenne* made a patriotic speech on behalf of a deputation of female spectators, the secretary read a letter from a Swiss member of the club, offering the society a sword 'as a prize for the first French general who makes an enemy of the Revolution bite the dust;' and Isnard, who was presiding, and was always ready with a theatrical gesture, waved the sword in the air, crying, 'Gentlemen, this weapon shall be for ever victorious! The French people will utter a great shout, and every other nation will answer to its voice! The combatants will cover the earth, and every enemy of liberty will be struck off the roll of free men.' This rhodomontade moved Robespierre to protest. 'I am for war,' he said, 'as much as anyone. But it must be such a war as the nation really needs—a war in which we shall first crush our enemies at home, and then march against our enemies abroad, if any still exist. But (he went on) the court and the king's ministers also desire war . . . and the nation will have nothing

¹Jac. 3/288.

to do with a war whose object, under a pretence of defending them, is to destroy liberty and the Constitution.' Now, Brissot knows all this; yet he says, 'Trust the government.' I say, 'Distrust it.' Distrust (*défiance*), whatever you may say, is the guardian of the people's rights: it bears the same relation to the passion of liberty as jealousy bears to the passion of love.' Or else Brissot says, 'Trust the people.' But the people has often been misled; and it is the duty of its leaders to see that it is not misled again. For this is not a war of liberation, leading to freedom, but a war waged by a despot against foreign princes, emigrants, and priests. Robespierre would rather have no such war at all; but if it must come, let it be a war of defence, in which Frenchmen can fight on their own soil, and for their own liberty. In any case, he declares, the country is not ready for war. 'Before we do anything else, we must manufacture munitions everywhere, untiringly; we must arm the National Guard, and the people, if only with pikes; we must adopt fresh and sterner methods to punish ministers whose negligence endangers the security of the state; and we must uphold the dignity of the people, and defend its rights, too frequently overlooked.' Above all, if war is inevitable, its conduct must be dictated by the people, not by the court. It must be a national war, leading to a national victory.

This defence of 'distrust,' the fruit (as he said) of 'three years' experience of perfidy and intrigue,' was cheered by the club, and circulated to the affiliated societies. Many of Robespierre's hearers were convinced for the first time of the treacherous intentions of the court, and realized that the motives behind Brissot's war policy might not be as honest as they seemed. But most people thought little of the political dangers of war, compared with its glories,¹ and found Robespierre's constant pessimism a little tiresome. Indeed, it may be doubted whether he did much service to the cause of liberty and democracy, in the long run, by a policy which could not be called defeatism only because the

¹Salomon (Corresp. 206) notices that there are posters everywhere, with *Guerre aux émigrants!*

country was not yet at war. By suggesting distrust in one quarter, he created it in others. For it could hardly be supposed that the regime of suspicion, denunciation, and revenge which he sought to impose would easily revert to the generous and loyal spirit of 1789. The patient was undoubtedly ill; but might not a national war—as Brissot and his friends felt—give him just the stimulant he needed? Robespierre's remedy was that of a political psychoanalyst, who would cure the country by concentrating its attention on the origin of its ills. By early experience and seminary training an 'introvert,' he could see no remedy for national ill-health but self-examination, confession (without benefit of absolution), and a scrupulous moralism. Such an attitude might (and indeed did) give him a reputation for political saintliness, but it could not produce real leadership, or a permanent improvement in the national health. Not only the failure of Robespierre's own career, but also that of Jacobinism, is closely connected with the political invalidism that first showed itself in the speech of December 18.

In one passage of his speech Robespierre had compared himself, not very felicitously, to the geese on the Capitol warning Manlius-Brissot of the approach of the Gauls. Brissot's reply showed that he needed no warnings, because he was, in fact, inviting the Gauls to attack. 'Treason on a big scale (*les grandes trahisons*),' he declared, 'is fatal only to the traitor. It is just what we need.' In other words, he admits even more than Robespierre has alleged. Louis is a traitor; but he, Brissot, is 'double-crossing' him. The king's 'limited war' is to be encouraged, so that it may lead to the discredit and overthrow of the crown, and to the establishment of a Girondist regime. Even Robespierre's negative policy was better, perhaps, than such an irresponsible gamble with the resources of patriotism.

V

The year 1792 opened stormily, and it was soon seen that there was to be no truce in the Robespierre-Brissot con-

troversy. On January 1 there was a 'scene' at the club, when Robespierre, from the chair, called Lasource, a friend of Brissot, to order, and Moreton, another *Brissotin* (as the party was now named) retorted by 'calling the chairman to fairness.' The next day Robespierre began a two days' speech (January 2, 11) expounding his whole view about the war. Though better known than that of December 18, it is not so important. Most of it reiterates the old arguments, at rather wearisome length.¹ Only in one passage is there some new material that needs attention. Brissot, who had travelled in England and America, and saw himself in the rôle of an international statesman, had pictured the coming war as a triumphant progress of revolutionary doctrine throughout the countries of Europe. 'Our generals,' as Robespierre put it, 'are to be missionaries of the Constitution; our camps are to be schools of public law; and the satellites of foreign princes, far from putting obstacles in the way of this plan, will fly to meet us, not to repel us by force, but to sit at our feet,' and to listen to the gospel of freedom. In answer to this engaging picture, Robespierre made some observations which, if they had been laid to heart, might have saved France from disillusionment, and Europe from many years of war. 'No one likes an armed missionary,' he said; 'and no more extravagant idea ever sprang from the head of a politician than to suppose that one people has only to enter another's territory with arms in its hands to make the latter adopt its laws and its Constitution. . . . Before the influences of our revolution can be felt abroad, it must be fully established at home. To expect to give freedom to foreign nations before we have achieved it ourselves, is a sure way to slavery, both for France and for the world. . . . The Declaration of Rights is not like the sun's rays, which in one moment illumine the whole earth: it is no thunderbolt, to strike down a thousand thrones. It is easier to inscribe it on paper, or to engrave it on brass, than to retrace its sacred characters in the hearts of men,

¹Jaurès (3/155) apropos of this speech, thinks Robespierre's suspicions of the Court were not justified. Mathiez, quoting the Queen's letter of December 9 to Mercy-Argenteau, answers that they were.

from which they have been erased by ignorance, passion, and despotism.'

It says much for the good sense of the Jacobin rank and file that a speech expressing (however eloquently) such unpalatable truths was enthusiastically received. 'It will be read and re-read,' wrote Desmoulins, 'in every section, every club, and every patriotic home . . . You cannot imagine,' he adds, 'the abandon, and the conviction of truth, with which some passages of this speech were delivered: it brought tears into the eyes not only of the women in the gallery, but also of half the members in the hall.'¹

Attempts were at last made to bring about a reconciliation between Brissot and Robespierre. On January 18 the latter had been careful, whilst criticising a passage in Brissot's paper, *Le patriote français*, to disclaim any personal attack; and two days later, whilst justifying himself, Brissot urged Robespierre to make up a quarrel which gave pleasure to no one except enemies of the state. The other made no move. Dussaulx, a veteran of the Seven Years' War who was a friend of both men, and whose age and learning commanded respect, exhorted them to be reconciled. 'After what M. Brissot has said, only one thing is needed, before the meeting adjourns—the sight of these two generous men embracing one another.' He had scarcely spoken (say the minutes) when Robespierre and Brissot were in each other's arms, amidst the unanimous applause of the society, which was touched by this moving spectacle.'

It was characteristic of Robespierre that he should wish no one to misunderstand a gesture which, though prompted by a real liking for Brissot, was deeply distasteful to his undemonstrative nature. Accordingly he went at once to the tribune, and explained that, in yielding to Dussaulx's suggestion, he had followed the promptings of his heart, and borne witness to his friendship for 'a man who is highly respected, and who is likely to render great services to the country'; but, he went on, 'this must not be thought to

¹Michon, *Adrien Duport*, 112. It was this speech which prompted Mme Chalabre's letter (v. 1/145).

make any difference to the opinions every man has the right to hold on questions of public policy'; and he announced his intention of answering Brissot's speech at a later meeting. Again, when Gorsas, trying to exploit the situation in the *Brissotin* interest, stated in his paper that 'M. Robespierre gave reason to hope that he would easily come to an agreement with M. Brissot over the war,'¹ he at once wrote, repeating what he had really said, and adding, 'I shall continue to oppose Brissot's views whenever they seem contrary to my principles . . . Let our union rest upon the holy basis of patriotism and virtue; and let us fight as free men, with frankness and (if need be) with determination, but also with respect and friendship for one another.'²

It was in this spirit that, on January 25, the day on which the Assembly issued its first ultimatum to the Emperor,³ Robespierre delivered the third of his speeches about the war. In this he dealt with the arguments for the good intentions of the King and his Ministers, exposed the unpreparedness of the country, and drew a gloomy picture of the future. 'Ah!' he cried, in a rhetorical peroration, 'I can see a great crowd of people dancing in an open plain covered with grass and flowers, making play with their weapons, and filling the air with shouts of joy, and songs of war. Suddenly the ground sinks under their feet; the flowers, the men, the weapons disappear; and I can see nothing but a gaping chasm, filled with victims. Fly! Fly, while there is still time, before the ground on which you stand opens beneath its covering of flowers!' This Isaiad might seem fantastic at the time; but it was remembered, before the year was out, when Brunswick's troops were almost at the gates of Paris.

VI

Robespierre seems to have been fully aware, at this time, of the danger of a purely negative policy. In the pause

¹*Courrier des 83 Départements*, January 22.

²Corresp. 117. It appeared in the *Courrier* of January 23.

³On January 6 it was announced that the Elector of Trèves had undertaken to disperse the emigrants. The immediate *casus belli* was removed. This did not please the war party, which proceeded (rather as in 1870) to ask the Emperor for a statement of his peaceful intentions.

which followed his third speech on the war—he did not deal with the subject again for more than a month—he set himself to think out a constructive policy; and this he expressed on February 10, in one of the best and most important of his speeches. Treating first of national defence, he charged the government with failing to carry out several suggestions that he had already made—the arming of the people, the reorganization of the higher command, the re-enlistment of discharged soldiers, and the ‘permanence’ of the Sections. He called for a fresh *fédération*, at which armed citizens from every Department should take the oath of liberty or death (*de vivre libres, ou de mourir*); and for a new military spirit, unrestrained by the old ties of army discipline, and expressing itself in the free and happy ritual of patriotism.¹ Turning to the internal state of the country, of which he saw evil omens in the troubles at Avignon, the reactionary petition of the Directory, the later acts of the Constituent Assembly, and the present behaviour of the Ministers, he did not think the remedy was to be found (as some proposed) in a popular Ministry, which would be subjected to the same corrupting influences as any other, but rather in closer public control both of the Legislative and of the Executive—he would, for instance, turn the *Manège* into a People’s Palace, capable of containing an immense audience; in throwing open all appointments to patriots, and none but patriots; in strong measures against speculation, profiteering, and the exportation of currency; in better conditions of service in the army; in the reform of the police system, and summary jurisdiction; and in doing something to meet the just grievances of the country population. More generally, he would push on enlightened legislation, especially in the direction of popular education, through schools, theatrical performances, and national festivals. For he believed that the heart of the people was healthy, and that, if only writers could be found to inspire, and men of wealth to finance its

¹Pétion, he suggested, as mayor of Paris, would be the ideal leader of such a crusade.

efforts, the Revolution would yet be victorious over all its enemies.

When Robespierre left the tribune, he was acclaimed as 'the hero of the Revolution,' and copies of his speech were circulated to all the Sections of Paris. It was, in truth, a fine attempt to escape from the poisonous fumes of party politics into the fresh air of constructive statesmanship; and even a generation that has grown distrustful of the promises of would-be dictators to end the ills of society can admire Robespierre's anticipation of ideas which were partly worked out under his own influence, during the Jacobin dictatorship of 1793-4, and which have, to a larger extent, become the common property of mankind.

In spite of this temporary triumph, Robespierre had little success in his campaign against the war. On January 17 the club had circularized its branches to the effect that war was inevitable. Now, on February 24, it was proposed to send them another letter, ending 'The majority of the society is in favour of war.' Robespierre challenged the statement, but without success; whilst his suggestion, that they should publish a summary of the arguments for and against the war, was too open-minded to please either side.

A week later (March 2) despatches from Vienna were read in the Assembly which fully justified Robespierre's suspicion of the connexion between war and counter-revolution; for they contained a passage in which the Emperor hinted that he might be driven to intervene in French affairs 'by the provocative and dangerous behaviour of the Jacobin party,' whom he described, in terms too obviously dictated from the Tuileries, as 'a pernicious sect, enemies of the most Christian King, and of the fundamental principles of the present constitution, and disturbers of the public peace.' The insult was bitterly resented by the club. Nevertheless, since capital had been made, and might still be made, out of the allegation of republicanism, Robespierre moved that the Jacobins should formally declare themselves 'Friends of the Constitution in its present form (*telle qu'elle est*).' 'I love the republican character,' he said, 'as much as

anyone: I know that republics are the nursery of all great souls, of all noble and generous sentiments: but I think that we should do wisely, at the present moment, to tell the whole world that we are firm friends of the Constitution—until the General Will is sufficiently enlightened by ripe experience to proclaim its desire for a happier state'. 'For my own part,' he ended, 'I prefer the king who is ours by accident of birth and circumstances to any other whom they would like to give us'—a hit at Carra's unfortunate suggestion of the Duke of Brunswick,¹ which was applauded in all parts of the House.

Two days later Barbaroux reported 'a cloud like a man's hand'—the first sign of the storm which was to break on August 10. 'The men of Marseille,' he said, 'are on the march'; and wrote home an enthusiastic account of the reception of the news at the Jacobins. 'Robespierre was magnificent: he said that anyone who spoke against Marseille in the Assembly was an infamous traitor'.²

VII

Meanwhile an event had taken place which altered the whole political situation. On March 10 Brissot had led an attack on de Lessart, the Minister for Foreign Affairs. The king had given way, and replaced him by a lively member of Brissot's party, whose ambition it was to combine the parts of Mirabeau and Lafayette—General Dumouriez. A week later the appointment of Clavière, Roland, Grave, and Lacoste, gave the *Brissotins* complete control of the government. A curious situation resulted. By a constitutional experiment which was not provided for in the settlement of 1791, and which, in cleverer hands, might have been accounted a stroke of genius, the king had secured Ministers representing the majority in the Assembly; at the same time he had discredited its leaders, by transferring to them the suspicion which attached itself, sooner or later,

¹January 4.

²He had recently (February 10, March 7, 14) denounced the Government's mismanagement of affairs in the Midi.

to all Ministers of the Crown. The *Brissotins* were hoist with their own petard. They had what they had coveted; they were in power. But they were doubly compromised, both because they had hoped to reach this position at the expense, not by favour of the king, and because they would now be saddled with his responsibility for the war, and, in the event of defeat, with his disgrace. They could not now draw back from a contest that they had provoked; yet they were utterly unprepared to force it to a successful issue. Dumouriez, indeed, believed in victory, and drove the new government along a path they would have liked to avoid—a path all the more dangerous, since at this very moment (March 10) the cautious Leopold died, and was succeeded by the militant Francis II. Finally, Dumouriez himself was an adventurer, whose patriotism was suspect, and whose policy might at any moment compromise his supporters.

This unnatural alliance between the *Brissotins* and the court was exactly what Robespierre had feared. But there was no need to meet trouble half-way; and when, on March 19, Dumouriez appeared at the club, wearing a *bonnet rouge*, and made a patriotic speech, he welcomed him coldly, but tactfully. When the general has fulfilled his promises, he said, and has won his victories, he will deserve our special thanks. Till then, he comes to the society as an ordinary member, to get sympathy and advice. At this, Dumouriez, who liked a gesture, even if it was not a new one, threw himself into Robespierre's arms,¹ amidst the applause of members and spectators, who 'regarded their embrace as a sign of alliance between the ministerial and popular points of view'.

There was, however, something very unreal about this scene; and the feeling found expression, as often happens, in a matter of detail. When Robespierre rose to speak, some officious person placed a *bonnet rouge* upon his carefully powdered *coiffure*. Disregarding a practice which had

¹Gower (163) says Dumouriez's speech 'worked so strongly upon Mr. Robespierre's feelings that he could not resist embracing the minister'.

recently grown up in the club, and disdaining to follow Dumouriez's example, he threw it to the ground. This, perhaps, needed some courage¹; but such was Robespierre's influence that when, later in the meeting, a letter from Pétion (no doubt inspired by himself) suggested the abolition of this new-fangled symbol of patriotism, the members at once put their *bonnets* in their pockets, and never wore them again.

Robespierre's critical attitude towards the new Ministry has sometimes been explained—notably by Michelet—as due to personal reasons. He was disappointed, it is said, at not being asked to join the government, and jealous of those who were. The latter explanation cannot be ignored; for he was losing the generosity with which he had welcomed Pétion's appointment to the mayoralty a few months before. But the former carries little conviction. Robespierre's quarrel with Brissot's policy, if not with Brissot himself, was too complete; and the king, who had good reason for trying to conciliate the majority in the Assembly, had no call to consider a minority in the club. It was not his personal exclusion from a government of whose policy he disapproved which embittered Robespierre's outlook during the next few months, but the knowledge that the destinies of the Revolution were at the mercy of a new Assembly, and new Ministers, who might wantonly hand over the country to a worse despotism than that from which it had so recently escaped.

VIII

This was why, when it was proposed (March 21) to circularize the Jacobin clubs, describing the *Brissotin* Ministry as a body of pure patriots, Robespierre drafted an alternative address, giving his own view of the situation. This address he read to the club five days later—at the very moment when (an unconscious proof of his worst suspicions) Marie-Antoinette was communicating to the

¹Souberbielle, who was there, used to quote it as an instance of Robespierre's 'civil courage' (Blanc, 6/299).

Austrians Dumouriez's plan of campaign).¹ It was, in the main, a restatement of the familiar arguments against war: but it contained one sentence which caused a strange resentment. In spite of all the courage and patience of the people (Robespierre had written), the policy of the court would have led to disaster, 'had not Providence, which always watches over us better than our own wisdom, struck down Leopold, and disconcerted for a time the schemes of our enemies.' It might have been objected that the death of the pacific Leopold contributed little to the safety of France; but one would have thought it harmless enough to attribute his removal to Providence. Yet it was precisely upon this point that Guadet, the Bordeaux lawyer, fastened in his reply. 'I have heard the word Providence', he said, 'repeated again and again in this address: I fancy it even says that Providence has saved us in spite of ourselves. I confess I can see no meaning in such a conception; and I should never have believed that a man who has worked so bravely for three years to liberate the people from the bondage of despotism would help to put it back under the bondage of superstition.' It would have been easy to meet this sneer by disavowing any serious meaning: if Robespierre had said he had been using a conventional formula, the club sceptics would have thought no more about it. Or he might have retorted that, not so long ago, Guadet himself, speaking of the court intrigues, had said, 'Providence, which watches over the destiny of France, defeated this detestable plot,' and had professed devotion to 'that heavenly religion, which is as pure as its author, as vast as nature, and as eternal as time.'² But he could not do so; for he knew that he believed what he had said: and the society was suddenly embarrassed by the most shocking thing that can happen in a political debate—a profession of religious faith. 'There is nothing superstitious,' Robespierre was heard to say, 'in using the name of the Deity. I believe, myself, in those eternal principles on which human weakness reposes, before

¹Letter to Mercy-Argenteau, March 26 (Jaurès, 3/236).

²Feb. 27, 1791 (Hamel, 1/47).

it starts on the adventure of virtue. These are not idle words in my mouth, any more than they have been to many great men who were none the less moral because they believed in the existence of God.' At this there were cries of 'Order! Order!' and a commotion (*brouhahas*): but Robespierre would not be stopped. 'No,' he went on, 'there is nothing outrageous in invoking the name of Providence, and expressing a conception of the Eternal Being who intimately affects the destinies of nations, and who seems to me personally to watch over the French Revolution in a very special way. It is a heartfelt belief; it is a feeling with which I cannot dispense. How could I ever have carried through (as I have) superhuman tasks, if I had not cultivated my soul (*élevé mon âme*)? This religious sense has more than compensated me for the loss of all the advantages to be gained by those who are willing to betray the people'.

When the question was put to the vote, Santhonax cried out 'A truce to monkery!' and the meeting ended in disorder. But many of Robespierre's hearers must have recalled this profession of faith two years later, when he brought forward proposals for the national 'worship of the Supreme Being'.

A reader of Robespierre's speeches shares the surprise of his Jacobin audience, when he is presented with this Jewish belief in a Special Providence directing the Revolution,¹ and finds that it is neither a relic of childish faith, undigested by the maturer mind, nor a grotesque that has slipped into the vacant niche of religion, but a firm and intimate conviction, the inspiration of a statesman's daily life. He did not realize before that Robespierre was a religious man. It was known that he had clerical teachers, and a seminarist training, and that he had lived most of his life at Arras, a centre of ecclesiasticism. He had been suspected, once or twice, since he came to Paris, of showing unusual sympathy for the cause of priests and monks. But it was understood that he had given up the practice of religion

¹ Jewish rather than Christian: or even pagan, for in one passage he substitutes Chance (*hasard*) for Providence; but anyhow a reality, not a matter of words.

while still at College; he had been heard to denounce the luxury and hypocrisy of rich churchmen; he had expressed his growing anger with the counter-revolutionary intrigues of the clergy; and although the persistence with which he championed the rights of the poor and the oppressed could not but inspire respect, it had been put down less to Christian charity than to philosophical convictions, backed by a touch of careerism. It alters one's whole view of the man, if the mainspring of his activity is a belief in a Divinity that shapes the ends of the Revolution.

Yet something of this kind is needed to explain both the passion with which the cold and *gauche* young lawyer pursues his intractable ideals, and his deep certainty that he is right, and others are wrong; for those who believe in divine guidance are generally guided where they wish to go. It is clear, in the light of this confession, how Robespierre can be Brissot's friend in society, but must be his enemy in politics—we had almost said, in religion.

The *Journal de Paris*, congratulating Robespierre on this speech, recalled the fact that a monument had recently been set up in honour of Rousseau. The allusion was just. Robespierre's religion was, indeed, the Deism that Jean-Jacques had learnt at Geneva, the centre of the League of Religions, and had put into the mouth of his *vicaire savoyard*. Like that, it was grafted upon conventional Catholicism: like that, it was the reaction of a solemn mind to a frivolous society: like that, it was a sentiment of the heart rather than a conclusion of the mind. But in two respects it was independent and original; for Rousseau's Providence, made in his own image, was a vagabond and cosmopolitan god, unconcerned with men's private affairs; whereas Robespierre's was a director of nations, and a patron of the Revolution: Rousseau's was a fair-weather deity, an object of idle and refined speculation, whilst Robespierre's was a consolation in trouble, and the inspiration of a work-a-day life. Nevertheless, the likeness of Robespierre's creed to Rousseauism is as striking as its divergence from the Voltairianism which was still fashionable among the

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intelligent and easy-going men of the world who were represented, on the whole, by the Girondist deputies; and it would not be fanciful to see, in this incident, the momentary unveiling of a fundamental difference of mind and outlook which separated the two great parties in the state.¹

IX

The question of the war had now reached its last and bitterest stage. Robespierre found himself once more unscrupulously attacked in the *Courrier des 83 départements*; and failing to get satisfaction from Gorsas, the editor,² pursued the matter at the club (April 2). His challenge was accepted by Réal, who took advantage of a division of opinion in the galleries to attack Robespierre in bolder language than had ever been heard there. 'I accuse you,' he said, 'of stubbornness and perversity in trying to pass off as the society's opinion on the war what is in fact nothing but your own. I accuse you of practising in this club—perhaps unconsciously, and I am sure unintentionally—a tyranny which presses heavily upon every free man within its walls.' Here Réal was interrupted, and could not go on: but neither was Robespierre allowed to reply; and it was evident enough that, whilst many of the members sympathized with Réal, most of them disliked the personal character of the controversies in which the apostle of principle seemed so often to be involved.

Only one thing now gave pause to such controversies—hostility to the king. In these last weeks before the war, all the mistakes of his party were recoiling upon his head. None, save the flight to Varennes, had so painfully affected public opinion as the suppression of the Nancy mutiny. It was too late to make amends by subscribing to the relief fund in aid of the imprisoned mutineers, though Danton's motion to refuse the royal donation (March 4) was defeated

¹Blanc, 6/334, f. Michelet has the same idea; but to him Voltaire, not Rousseau, is the true Frenchman, and Thermidor is a Voltairian *revanche*.

²Who refused to print his letter of protest (Corresp. 126).

by Robespierre.¹ The arrival of the released prisoners in Paris (April 9) was too good an opportunity to be missed, and recent differences were for the moment forgotten in the enthusiasm with which Robespierrists and *Brissotins* united to fête the victims of Bouillé and Lafayette. It was Robespierre's special aim to direct the demonstration against Lafayette. Nor is his motive obscure. It is not the Lafayette of the Nancy mutiny, or even of the massacre of the Champ de Mars, whom he is really attacking, but the prospective dictator—the man more likely than any other to use the army against the Revolution. 'Against whom,' he asks, 'do you think you have to struggle? The aristocrats? The court? No; but against a general, long since commissioned by the court, that enemy of freedom, to carry out its designs; a general who has deceived the people, and is deceiving the crown; who is a stranger to the principles of liberty and equality—nay, who is their greatest foe. We are indeed surrounded by enemies of freedom, but Lafayette is the most dangerous of them all; for he still wears the mask of patriotism well enough to hold under his banner a considerable number of the less enlightened citizens. Bouillé was not wholly to blame: he was only the agent of the court, and above all of Lafayette'; and there follows much more in the same inflammatory tone. He ends by demanding that the busts of Bailly and Lafayette shall be removed from the Town Hall, and that the 'slogan' of the forthcoming fête shall be, not, 'Down with Bouillé!' but 'Down with the tyrants'; which Merlin interpreted well enough when he corrected it to 'Down with Lafayette!' (*Lafayette seul est coupable*); and so it stood. On April 9 the released soldiers were welcomed in the Assembly, and at the club, where the Girondist Vergniaud, as President, made them a complimentary speech, and gave the *accolade* to the oldest and youngest of their number. Collot d'Herbois, anxious that the Girondins should not get all the credit of the occasion, suggested that the visitors would no doubt like

¹The royal family contributed 210 *livres* to a fund collected by the Feuillants in the Tuileries section.

to hear Robespierre, 'who had interested himself so much in their case'; and the Jacobin orator, probably primed for the occasion, spoke of the services they had rendered to the cause of freedom, and brought up once more his suggestion for the re-enlistment of those who had been unfairly dismissed from the army.

Still determined to keep the demonstration on Jacobin lines, Robespierre intervened, within the next few days, with a fresh attack on Lafayette (April 11), a warning against the activities of bad patriots (April 13), and a proposal to associate the National Guard and the *Gardes françaises* with the coming celebrations (April 14).¹

On Sunday the 15th, the 'Fête of Liberty' at last took place. A hundred thousand citizens paraded the streets, bearing emblems of peace and plenty, and escorting a car of freedom, mounted on the *chassis* used for the apotheosis of Voltaire, and painted by David with appropriate scenes from the lives of Brutus and William Tell; as well as two *sarcophagi* dedicated to the dead members of the Châteaueux regiment, and of the National Guard. Two days later Robespierre proposed an inscription to commemorate the occasion as one on which 'poverty and the people triumphed with the *gardes françaises*, the soldiers of Châteaueux, and all good citizens persecuted on account of the Revolution'; and Merlin suggested that he should apply his 'fiery spirit' to the composition of a history of the fête.

It was, indeed, generally recognized as 'Robespierre's fête.' 'M. Robespierre has given his orders,' wrote Salamon, 'and they will be obeyed.'² The Girondists had the consoling memory of a few speeches. The royalists could only revenge themselves by lampoons.³ It was a forecast of what was to happen, on a more serious scale, a few months later. Yet one may well pause to ask why Robespierre not merely tolerated, but enthusiastically supported, a provocative and rather silly demonstration. His motives were not so simple

¹He had already (April 8) denounced a pasquinade by 'Lieut. Oatmealbread' (Paindavoine) protesting against the fête.

²*Correspondance*, 389.

³e.g. a 'Hymn of invasion' to the metre and tune of *O filii, o filiae!* (R.F. 22/390).

as they would have been a year earlier. With love of liberty, and sympathy for victims of military despotism, was now combined a desire to discredit the war party, and to outbid the Girondins in popular favour; reasons which belong to a new Robespierre, whose nature has become narrowed and embittered by political controversy, and whose nerves have been worn by illness,¹ and by the constant strain of debate.

A foreigner visiting the Jacobins about this time was struck by the impertinence of Robespierre's manner. 'Entering the club, he would throw himself on a solitary chair near the door, cross his legs, lean back his carefully curled head, and, without taking any part in the discussion, give the impression that he owned the club, and was waiting to see whether anything turned up to interest him. His flattened, almost crushed in, features, his pale complexion, and his cunning look, made his impertinence peculiarly provocative.'²

Two curious incidents end this phase of Robespierre's career. On April 11 Desfieux proposed that the club should subscribe towards the cost of experiments with a new kind of gun, which was said to be capable of firing twenty-five rounds a minute. Robespierre objected, not wholly on grounds of humanity. 'I have,' he said, 'a confession to make. This same proposal was brought before me towards the end of the session of the Constituent Assembly. A demonstration was given in the garden of the house where I was then living. The invention consisted of a carbine that fired nine rounds without re-charging. When the inventor asked my opinion, I advised him to make no use of his discovery; and he has not said a word about it. I will repeat here what I told him—that a discovery of this kind, if put into the hands of a free people, can indeed give them a temporary advantage over their oppressors, but that, sooner or later, it will get into the hands of the oppressors themselves, and then it will become one weapon more for enslaving the people.'

On April 13, on the eve of the Châteaueux fête, the

¹v. Augustin's letter of March 19 (Corresp. 122). Robespierre only spoke once at the Jacobins between March 7 and 19.

²Reichardt's diary (R.F. 23/84).

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Jacobin club was the scene of an incident that has special interest for Englishmen. 'Deputies from the Constitutional Society of Manchester,' so run the minutes, 'introduced by M. Robespierre, requested and obtained admission to the meeting in order to ask for the affiliation of their society.' These deputies, Thomas Cooper and James Watt, not only read an address to the club, but also took part, to the great scandal of most of their compatriots, in the public procession of the 15th.

X

What of Robespierre's correspondence during these months of political strain?

It opens (November 30) with the cheerful outlook of a man just back from a holiday, who can be equally pleased with the new Assembly, with the state of public opinion, and with his friend Pétion's election to the mayoralty of Paris.¹ But this mood does not last long. It is disturbed by gloomy letters from his brother at Arras,² and from Simond at Strasbourg, showing only too clearly the failure of the Paris revolution to carry the country-side along with it, now that the peasantry, rid of their feudal burdens, and in possession of the land, are growing indifferent to further progress, and dislike the new paper currency as much as the prospect of war.³ It is disturbed also by new importunities to which Robespierre's reputation exposes him. An Englishwoman, whose name is variously transcribed as 'Miss J. Theeman Stephen', or 'Miss Freeman Shepherd',⁴ has a sum of money she wishes to place at his disposal. He had, she implies, been to see her, and had promised to accept her 'small offering'; but she now sees from her bank book that he had not done so. She will, if he likes, send another order, payable at once. The sequel is unknown. Perhaps Robespierre had been merely forgetful: perhaps he thought it wiser to refuse a contribution that might have

¹Corresp. 110.

²Corresp. 111, 112.

³Corresp. 113, 118.

⁴The first version comes from Berville and Barrière, who give the address of the writer as 'Fresnel' or 'Tresnel', the second from the catalogue of the sale of autographs in which the letter figured in 1862 (Fleischmann, 247, 282).

been misunderstood.¹ A little later a member of the Cordeliers club asks him to stand as godfather for his child.² Another admirer, who characterizes Robespierre as 'a man eminently sympathetic, beneficent, and humane,' asks for an interview in order to plead the cause of 'an unfortunate patriot.'³ The Jacobin club at Caen thank him for services rendered to some of their compatriots.⁴

Of more importance is a letter from Mme Roland, found among Couthon's papers, and addressed to a person whom it is not difficult to identify as Robespierre. She has come back from the country (March 27), and is staying in Paris at the Hôtel Britannique. She has been delighted to receive a complimentary letter from him, and hopes he will come to see her. 'I maintain here,' she adds, 'a simplicity which (I hope) will make me worthy of your regard, although I *have* the misfortune to be the wife of a Minister. I cannot hope to contribute anything useful (she means, to the party counsels), unless wise patriots help me with their ideas and their attentions. You are at the head of my list. So please come at once. I am eager to see you, and to tell you again of my regard for you—a regard which nothing can alter.'⁵ Robespierre seems to have accepted this invitation; but it led to disillusionment on both sides. There is, at any rate, among Mme Roland's papers, a significant note written to her friend Bosc, which her editor dates early in April, and which begins: 'R.b.p. is with me at my house. He asked me for an interview. I shall be alone, and shall do all I can to be uninterrupted, at seven o'clock this evening.'⁶ We notice (if this is the occasion of the letter) the little deception: it was not he who had asked for the interview, but herself. She does not want to be found making overtures to one whom (in spite of her flattery) she already suspects to be a political enemy. It was, indeed, the breaking-point of their friendship. When she wrote again (April 25), war had been declared: she had made a last attempt to see Robespierre, and to win his support for the policy of her husband, and

¹Corresp. 116.

⁴Corresp. 121.

²Corresp. 119.

⁵Corresp. 124.

³Corresp. 120.

⁶Corresp., ed. Perroud, 2/417.

of his friends; and he had refused to come. 'I wanted to see you,' she says, 'because I believe you have an ardent love of liberty, and a whole-hearted devotion to the public good, and because I experienced, at our last interview, the sense of pleasure and usefulness that comes to good citizens when they express their feelings, and explain their views. The more you appeared to me to disagree, on an interesting question, with men whose advice and integrity I esteem, the more important it seemed to be to bring together those who are working for the same end, and who ought to be able to agree as to the best means of achieving it. . . . It has pained me to see you convinced that, if anyone, knowing the facts, thought otherwise than yourself about the war, he could not be a good citizen.' He promised (she goes on) to give her his reasons for this attitude; why is he avoiding her? None of her friends are (as he has evidently alleged) his 'mortal enemies.' She does not receive them 'intimately.' Her Constitutionalist friends are not 'intriguers.' Time will judge between them. 'It is for you to consider,' she ends, with a feminine weakness for a spiteful postscript, 'that the verdict of time may either eternalize your glory, or condemn it to endless annihilation.'¹ It is not difficult to reconstruct from this letter the kind of reply Robespierre would have sent to a spoilt and offended woman. All his hatred of the war, all his suspicions of the new Ministry, all his hyper-sensitiveness to opposition and intrigue, would keep him from her door. The element in which she hoped to fuse public enmity and private friendship was too unreal for him. His incorruptibility—or was it his intransigence?—refused a commitment which had every worldly argument on its side, as well as some considerations of public service. And for what good end? Did he already foresee the disasters of the war, the fall of the throne, and the Jacobin supremacy? Or was he just making the choice that conscience dictated, and leaving the future to Providence, which he sometimes called Chance?

Another source of worry at this time was the position

¹Corresp. 132, ed. Perroud, 2/418.

of his brother and sister at Arras. Augustin always had a grievance. Either the Assembly has not answered a question he asked about the criminal law, or he has failed to get a judgeship, or he cannot recover the cost of postage on a parcel, or he is short of cash, and reminds Maximilien of the obligation to support his poor relations.¹ The only thing that would satisfy them was a migration from Arras to the capital; and that was ultimately arranged.

On April 10 Robespierre wrote to Roederer, as *procureur-syndic* of the Paris Department, resigning his useless office of Public Prosecutor. He had been appointed exactly ten months before, and for eight months afterwards the court to which he was attached had never come into being. During February and March the members of the tribunal had met informally to determine their procedure; and had once or twice gone so far as to 'interrogate certain accused persons,' and to deal with 'difficulties likely to arise in starting a new form of jurisdiction.' Whether or not Robespierre disapproved of these tedious proceedings, at any rate he attended so seldom that he was rebuked by the President, Treilhard, for his laxity; and, a few days before the first formal session of the court, sent in his resignation. Treilhard was instructed to reply politely (such is his own account), but in terms which could not be quoted as evidence that Robespierre had done his duty; his letter is a model of tact. The moments, he said, unhappily only too few, during which he and his colleagues had been able to enjoy Robespierre's presence and advice, only confirmed their feelings, and made them regret all the more his resignation.² Hamel, indeed, claims to have found evidence in the 'dusty dossiers' of the tribunal that Robespierre took an active part in its work: but Treilhard's letter is proof that he did not. Even his admirer Barbaroux was angry, and wrote, 'M. Robespierre cannot be forgiven for resigning so important a post.'³ But it was ridiculous to accuse him of doing so for interested motives; for he was surrendering an income of 8,000 *livres* a year, and a position

¹Corresp. 127.²Corresp. 129. Pap. inéd. 3/277.³Corresp. 139.

of value to his party (as Barbaroux saw), which was filled up a few days later by the election of Duport—a Feuillant, and a personal enemy of his own. His resignation may have been a gesture, at a moment when his *Brissotin* opponents were helping themselves to Ministerial salaries. But in any case he wanted his whole time free for political work, and for a new venture in journalism.

The last two letters before the declaration of war deal with the affairs of the Jacobin club at Pamiers, where Robespierre's speeches had been much admired, and where his portrait had been put up side by side with that of Mirabeau. His correspondent was his future enemy, Vadier, who at this time claimed his friendship, on the ground of 'identity of principles and attachments, during the perilous course that we have so proudly run.' Robespierre may often have reflected that his friends were more compromising than his enemies.

XI

On April 20 Louis XVI came to the Assembly, and proposed a declaration of war against the King of Hungary and Bohemia. It was voted almost unanimously. At Strasbourg, on the 25th, Rouget de l'Isle sang the *Marseillaise*. France was on the road to Valmy and Waterloo.

CHAPTER VIII

THE DEFENDER OF THE CONSTITUTION (APRIL-AUGUST, 1792)

I

A DECLARATION of war is generally a serious moment in the life of a people, when anything that hinders national unity is sacrificed to the one end of winning through to victory. But this was not the temper of France in April, 1792. The war did not come through a sudden crisis, carrying the people off its feet. It had been anticipated for nine months; for four it had been a constant subject of political controversy. Its very outbreak was an anti-climax. If the declaration had been made in June, 1791, it would have had all the accompaniments of a great national act—the flight of a king, a threat of foreign troops on the frontier, the destruction of emblems of royalty, a calm and united Assembly, the rush of volunteers to the colours. But the great moment had passed. The king had come back, and had been officially forgiven. Republicans had been shot down, and royalism had again become respectable. The politicians had resumed their quarrels, and the army its process of disintegration. Now that war had really come, it did not feel so near or so real as it had ten months ago. It was not a national war, engaged in hot anger, or through a sudden danger to the country. It was a war of calculation, the work of a political party, in league with self-interested financiers,¹ and a discredited court. The war-mongers, too, had done little to interest or educate public opinion, and popular propaganda had been almost confined to a fête

¹v. the letter of the Paris banker Hottinguer to Amet, Ramus, et Cie of Havre, quoted in A.H. 2/489, and ending, 'The harm resulting from a war will be less than that of a prolongation of our present position; and when the business man has contributed his share to the country, he may be allowed to pay another share into his own account. You will understand what we mean.'

whose object was to stigmatize military discipline, and to glorify resistance to the government. The country was, indeed, in a warlike mood; but it was also, as Robespierre had seen, quite unready for war; and hostilities could hardly begin with anything but disaster.

What was a patriot to do? Suppress his private feelings, make up his quarrel with the *Brissotins*, and support the government? Or retire from public life, and trust Providence to bring France to sanity and safety? Robespierre could do neither. He was making discoveries about himself, as men do in a crisis. One was, that he could not remain on friendly terms with people of whose policy he disapproved. Another was, that he did not trust Providence to save France without his own help.

Moreover, nature had made him a man who could never take things lightly. Others, with an equal belief in first principles, might yet admit degrees of priority in their application: to Robespierre they were all alike. Others, sharing his dislike of the origin of the war, and his distrust of the men who were to manage it, might yet have closed their eyes to the past, and turned their attention to the avoidance of similar blunders in the future. Not so Robespierre. The political maze into which he had wandered seemed to be constantly doubling upon itself, and bringing him back to his starting-point. The fresh obstacles to his progress were indistinguishable from the old: now it was Louis, now Lafayette, now Guadet, now Brissot: all were enemies of liberty, of the people, of Robespierre himself (he was by no means sure of the difference between these terms); and all must be met in the same way, in the name of that Providence which overrules the national destiny. That is why Robespierre's war speeches are so monotonous, and so denunciatory. He does not believe that the situation can be retrieved by a forward-looking policy, but only by an inward and therefore also a backward-looking change of mind. It is as a preacher, not as a statesman, that he faces the issue before the nation.

Again, as he is concerned with the effect of the war

upon the French people, rather than upon French prestige, it is not the foreign front that interests him, so much as the home front. 'I agree,' he is reported as saying on April 10, 'that we ought to conquer Brabant, the Netherlands, Liège, Flanders, etc. But this must not be allowed to remain a court war, or a government war. The French people must rise forthwith, and arm itself, not only to fight on the frontiers, but also to keep a watch over despotism here at home. This is a civil war: its origin is at home; and it is the home front that we must watch'.

II

This vigilance involved Robespierre in a fresh series of those personal encounters which were becoming inseparable from the debates at the club, and which—however tiresome they may be—a biographer cannot ignore. Robespierre, at any rate, did not begin them; the attack came from the other side.

Somebody reported that an affiliated society had set up a bust of Robespierre, contrary to a resolution of the club forbidding such honours to living statesmen. Why, another speaker asked, should a bust of Lafayette, whom Robespierre had denounced, still stand in the Hotel de Ville? Théroigne de Méricourt, an ambiguous foreign adventuress, who had until recently lived an extravagant and perhaps disreputable life in circles frequented by Desmoulins, Pétion, and other friends of Robespierre, had been using his name to advertise a political club for women in the Faubourg Saint-Anthoine, and he was forced to disclaim a compromising alliance.¹ Finally, after a protest against personalities by Brissot, he was openly attacked by Brissot's friend, Guadet. 'I denounce him', he said, 'for constantly talking about patriotism, and then deserting the post (of Public Prosecutor) to which he was elected; I denounce him for becoming, either by ill-luck or ambition, the idol of the people; and

¹Particularly as Théroigne had just been released, by special instructions of the Emperor, from an Austrian prison, and might be suspected of being a spy.

I call his attention (so the modest speaker continued) to another man, who would rather die than desert the post of duty—I mean myself'. Robespierre's immediate answer was almost apologetic. 'I know I am blamed', he said, 'for making so many speeches; but I only do it to guarantee liberty, to establish equality, and to disperse intrigue'. When these aims are attained, he will gladly retire into private life. 'Glad, because my fellow-citizens are happy, I shall spend my days in peace, and in the delights of a sweet and blessed retirement'. Nevertheless, and in spite of several expressions of opinion in the club¹ that it would be better to drop personalities, and get on with the business of the war, Robespierre insisted upon his right to make a formal reply to Guadet's charges; and one may be glad that he did, for the speech is a valuable bit of autobiography.

He begins by saying that, as an upholder of freedom of speech, he cannot complain of personal attacks: 'liberty of denunciation is the people's safeguard, and the sacred right of every citizen'. But he shows their absurdity by pointing to his actual record and reputation in public life, from the time of his protest against the Lamoignon decrees² to his recent campaign against the war. He describes his early stand for popular rights in Artois, the enthusiasm inspired in him by the first days of the National Assembly, and his long opposition there, in an honourable minority, to the later reaction against democracy. He takes credit for the 'Self-denying Ordinance' which excluded himself from the Legislative Assembly, and perhaps from the Ministry, in the interests of Brissot, Condorcet, and their friends. He describes himself as the saviour of the Jacobin club, in the dangerous days of 1791. And for all this he is labelled a factionist (*factieux*), or—to use a newly invented term of abuse—an agitator (*agitateur*)! He is charged with deserting his post of Public Prosecutor, though he had always said he would give it up, if at any time it interfered with the more important work of 'pleading the cause of liberty and humanity before the bar of the universe, and of genera-

¹By Albitte, Basire, and Prieur de la Marne.

²v. 1/39.

tions to come'. He had even been exhorted to ostracize himself, and go into voluntary exile. But what despot would give him an asylum? And how could he abandon his country at such a crisis of its fate? 'Heaven', he concludes, 'which gave me a heart full of the passion of liberty, and yet fixed my birth-place under the heel of tyrants; heaven, which prolonged my days till the reign of faction and crime, may be calling me to mark with my blood the path my country has to tread towards freedom and happiness. I grasp with delight this sweet and glorious destiny'.

This is, on the whole, the most convincing apologia for Robespierre's career. If the martyr's pose seems a trifle theatrical, if the emphasis on his own services leaves Providence too little credit, yet the essential account rings true. Robespierre had been genuinely moved by the national enthusiasm of 1789. No one had laid so deeply to heart 'that great moral and political truth preached by Jean-Jacques, that men have a sincere affection for those who really love them; that only the people is good, just, and generous; and that corruption and tyranny are the monopoly of those who disdain the common crowd'. No one could have stood by that faith more loyally in times of misunderstanding, slander, and intrigue. It does not affect this view of his character—though it may of his intelligence—if one regards Rousseau's generalization as perilously near nonsense; nor was it entirely Robespierre's fault that prophecy so often became denunciation, and principles so easily turned into personalities. There was ample precedent for it among the prophets.

Nevertheless this development was exercising the minds of patriots; and the puzzlement of Albitte, Basire, and Prieur was followed, a few days later (April 26) by a private protest from the man who, next to Robespierre himself, carried most weight in his party, with whom he had lately collaborated in a patriotic manifesto, and who had, until lately, been regarded as his greatest friend.¹ In a long letter

¹Their joint *Observations sur la nécessité de la réunion des hommes de bon foi contre les intrigues* was published early in 1792 (Hamel, 2/71). They had been called 'two fingers of the same hand' (Mercier, *New Picture*, 1/148).

deploring yesterday's scene at the Jacobins, and the 'hideous human passions' that were splitting the club, and ruining the popular cause, Pétion said, 'We have lost the quiet energy of free men. We no longer judge things coolly. We shout like children or lunatics. I simply tremble when I consider how we are behaving, and I ask myself every moment whether we can continue to be free. I cannot sleep at nights; for my usually peaceful slumbers are disturbed by dreams of disaster.' He goes on to say that the chief cause of these quarrels lies in 'aggravated self-concern, and frustrated ambition'—a phrase in which he evidently suggests that Robespierre is jealous of his mayoralty, and of the *Brissotin* Ministers, and is venting his disappointment in personal bitterness.¹ 'Think this over seriously', he ends, 'and redouble your efforts to rescue us from this *mauvais pas*'. Robespierre does not seem to have answered this spiteful and fussy letter. At any rate, three days later Pétion writes again, saying that the situation at the club is worse than ever, and that he intends to raise the point there the same evening. And so he did, in a long speech, at the end of which the House, by passing to the next business, prevented Robespierre from making any reply. When, a few days later, Doppet proposed that in future all denunciations should be dealt with by a committee, Robespierre protested that this procedure would remove the safeguard of publicity. 'I think, as others do', he said, 'that there ought to be some limit to a good citizen's zeal in denunciation; but if the club were to forbid my answering the libellists who cabal against me, I should resign, and go into retirement'; at which several women in the gallery were heard to remark, 'And we will go with you'. Robespierre's further attempts to answer Brissot's attacks led to a disorderly scene, in which all the members seemed to be on their feet at once, and which was only closed by a conciliatory motion, impugning the accuracy of the printed version of Brissot's indictment.

¹So too Salamón, writing on April 30, attributes the quarrels of the Jacobin leaders to the disappointment of 'people like Collot d'Herbois and Robespierre' at being excluded from the Ministry.

III

But by now news was beginning to come in from the front; and, as Robespierre had anticipated, it was a story of unrelieved disaster. On May 1 it was learnt that the first two armies to take the field—that of Dillon advancing on Tournai, and that of Biron on Mons—had both broken and fled, and that Dillon had been killed by his own men. Within a fortnight several regiments went over to the enemy, a number of officers deserted or resigned, the generals refused to resume the offensive, and Grave, the Minister of War, threw up his post. All this was a terrible shock to patriotic pride. Robespierre could do no more than cry 'Treason!' with the men who murdered Dillon, denounce the generals, and reiterate his old demand for the re-enlistment of discharged soldiers.

During the week that followed, a visitor to the club might have been excused for thinking that the members had quite lost their heads: the war seemed to be forgotten in an orgy of accusation and counter-accusation. On May 2 the Girondins signalized their break with the Jacobins, and their *rapprochement* with the Feuillants, by carrying a decree against Marat. On the 6th Danjou proposed, as an 'emetic remedy' for the situation, the replacement of Louis XVI by a British prince, and was denounced by Robespierre as a madman, an intriguer, and a Feuillant in disguise. A letter from the front deploring the divisions among the Jacobins was hissed by women in the gallery. Another praising Lafayette, and attacking Robespierre, was denounced by the latter as an insult, not only to himself, but to the society. Finally the Girondin Louvet interrupted Robespierre in the middle of a speech, with charges of tyrannizing over the club. 'The only despotism Robespierre exercises here', retorted Mendoza, 'is that of virtue'; and Danton closed a discreditable scene by declaring, in similar terms, that 'M. Robespierre has never used any tyranny in this House, unless it is the tyranny of reason: it is not patriotism, but jealousy, that inspires the attacks against him'.¹

¹cp. Hamel, 2/112.

But though both these statements might be true, one cannot but think that the feeling against Robespierre was based on something more than mere jealousy and unreason. It is possible to be right in a wrong way; and almost impossible to attack people's principles without giving the impression that you are attacking their character. In both ways Robespierre had offended; whilst his cold rectitude exasperated the offence, and his lack of humour made him specially vulnerable to counter-attack.

He had, indeed, plenty of champions, but of an embarrassing kind. J. F. Delacroix's pamphlet in his favour, and the proposal to follow it up with a paper defending him against the attacks of the reactionary press, might have been welcome.¹ But it cannot have been altogether agreeable, for a person of Robespierre's Puritan correctness, to be supported by the gross invective of Hébert's *Père Duchesne*, or the brilliant indiscretions of Desmoulins' *Tribune des Patriotes*. As for Marat, whose advocacy would have been even more compromising—that clear-sighted and intolerant fanatic declared, in answer to an accusation by Guadet, that he had had no dealings with Robespierre, either as man or editor, except a solitary interview, when Robespierre had protested against his violence, and had been reduced to horrified silence by Marat's exposition of his editorial policy. 'Our interview', wrote the Friend of the People, 'confirmed the opinion I had always had of him—that he combined the enlightened ideas of a wise senator with the uprightness of a gentleman (*homme de bien*), and the zeal of a patriot, but that he had neither the outlook nor the audacity that make a statesman.'²

IV

Such considerations were of less moment when Robespierre himself became an editor. It was the natural course,

¹*L'intrigue dévoilée, ou Robespierre vengé des outrages et des calomnies des ambitieux* (Brit. Mus. R. 112 (7)). The paper was to be called *Accusateur Public*. Prudhomme's *Révolution de Paris* had recently turned against Robespierre.

²*L'Ami du Peuple*, No. 648, cp. Robespierre's reply to Louvet, 1/288.

in those days, for a politician no longer in Parliament. There was so little difference between printing a speech and editing a paper, that no editorial experience, no staff, no offices or organization were required. There need only be enough manuscript ready, once a week, to fill three or four sheets of small octavo size, and sufficient cash to pay the printer's bill. There would be no great profit on the venture, but there need be no great loss. It was the means by which many of Robespierre's friends or rivals had built up, not indeed a party, but a public.¹ Hitherto he had been too busy, and too sure of an audience in the Assembly, or at the club, to feel the need of such methods. But now, isolated, driven back upon himself, and attacked by a hostile press, he determined to embark on journalism. From the middle of May, *Le Défenseur de la Constitution*, par Maximilien Robespierre, began to appear every Tuesday in its red paper cover. The editor described himself, consistently with the title of his journal, as *Député à l'Assemblée constituante*. He gave the price of a subscription as thirty-six *livres* a year, to be paid to P. J. Duplain, *Libraire, Cour du Commerce, rue de l'ancienne Comédie française*: the paper could also be obtained—it was hopefully noted—at the principal booksellers of Europe, and at every post-office. Duplain was ready to receive correspondence, news, and books for review; but anything sent through the post must be properly franked.²

Robespierre explained his aims in a preliminary prospectus. 'Reason and public interest', he declared, 'started the Revolution; ambition and intrigue have stopped it. It has been transformed by the vices of slaves and tyrants into a lamentable state of trouble and crisis. Most of the nation want to settle down under the auspices of the new Constitution, to the enjoyment of liberty and peace. What has prevented them? Ignorance and division'. For the public

¹Carra, Condorcet, Brissot, Gorsas, Barère, Marat, Desmoulins, Robert, Tallien, Audouin, Dulaure, Lequinio, Rabaut Saint-Étienne, Louvet, Villette, Fauchet, were all editors (Fleischmann, 146).

²The British Museum copy, which was Croker's, contains, on the inside of the cover, advertisements of other publications on sale at the same establishment, including Delolme's *Constitution de l'Angleterre*, and Mirabeau's *Considérations sur l'Ordre de Cincinnatus*.

does not know how to get what it wants, and the enemies of the Constitution propagate discord. 'In this state of things we have only one means left by which to save the situation: we must educate the good will of patriots, and guide it towards a common end'. Robespierre enumerates five ways in which he hopes to do this—by rallying support round the Constitution, by expounding the causes and remedies of the present ills, by explaining the real nature of political developments, by analysing the conduct of public men, and by calling before the bar of public opinion those who cannot be made legally accountable. 'Placed since the beginning of the Revolution,' he says, 'at the centre of political happenings, I have had a close view of the tortuous advance of tyranny; I have discovered that our most dangerous enemies are not those who have openly declared themselves; and I shall try to render my knowledge of value for the safety of my country. I need not say (he concludes) that my pen will be directed solely by the love of justice and truth. On no other terms can one descend from the tribune of the French senate, to mount the steps of the Universe, and to speak, not to an Assembly, but to the whole human race. It may be that, when one has left the stage to sit among the audience, one can form a better opinion of the play, and of the actors. Certainly those who escape from the whirl of business breathe a purer and more peaceful air, and pass a surer judgement upon men and affairs; just as the traveller who flees from the tumult of the city, to climb the summit of a mountain range, there feels the calm of nature sink into his soul, and his thoughts widen with his horizon.'¹

No. 1 of the *Défenseur* (May 19) is headed *Exposition des principes*, and begins with fifteen pages on the sense in which Robespierre is championing the Constitution. 'The Constitution which I mean to defend', so he defines his venture, 'is the Constitution just as it stands.' He knows that he will be asked, 'Why then did you attack this Consti-

¹The first metaphor is natural to a confirmed theatre-goer; the second, if not a commonplace from Rousseau, may perhaps be connected with the excursion to Lens (Corresp. 5).

tution, nine months ago?' His answer is, that the Constituent Assembly, falling from its high promise, passed certain decrees,—notably those on the property franchise—which violated fundamental principles of the Constitution; and that the Legislative Assembly, which might have revised them,¹ has let them stand. These were the parts of the Constitution that he opposed. Now that there is no hope of revision, and that a new party in the state is trying to destroy the whole constitutional structure, good and bad alike, 'to erect a royal tyranny, or a kind of aristocratic regime, upon its ruins', he finds no rallying-point left but the Constitution.

He has been accused both of royalism² and of republicanism. 'I care no more for Cromwell', he replies, 'than for Charles I. The yoke of the Decemvirs is as intolerable to me as that of Tarquin'. Surely it is not in the words 'monarchy' or 'republic' that we shall find the solution of the great problems of society? All forms of political constitution exist for the people: if they forget this, they are no better than attempts on the life of society. He was not to blame for the republican fiasco of last July: that was the work of Brissot and Condorcet. Rally round the Constitution, then. Defend it against both the king and the factions. Put up with its imperfections till they can be remedied in a time of union and peace. 'Its faults are human, but its foundations are the work of Heaven, and it bears within itself the deathless germ of its perfection.'

Such was the defensive side of Robespierre's policy. Its offensive side was his attitude towards the war; and this he proceeded to define in the second part of his first number, entitled, *Observations sur les moyens de faire utilement la guerre*. 'The war has begun: nothing remains for us but to take what precautions we can to turn it to the profit of the Revolution. Let us make it a war of the people against tyranny, instead of a war of the court, the nobility, the plotters, and the speculators against the people. It has begun

¹It could only have done so in defiance of the Constitution.

²Harmand de la Meuse (*Anecdotes*, 51) says that Robespierre edited the *Defenseur* in a royalist spirit in order to be made tutor to the Dauphin.

in defeat; it must be made to end in victory'. But how? First, we must look back, and see what mistakes the government made at the outset. Secondly, we must remember that this is a holy war, in the name of Liberty, Equality, and the People, and wage it in that spirit. Take the Dillon affair, for instance. Robespierre does not blame the men for killing their general: he wastes no time on talk of indiscipline—a by-product of a vile system of mechanical obedience. The remedy is not to punish the murderers, but to reform the spirit of the army, and especially of the higher command. Above all, 'it is an absolutely essential condition of success against our enemies abroad that we should make war upon our enemies at home, that is, upon injustice, aristocracy, treachery, and despotism'. Away with the idle curiosity which is only interested in battles, and idolizes the victorious general. Rather, we must guard against ambition and intrigue in our generals, as we do against treachery and peculation in our politicians, 'lest there arise in France any citizen formidable enough to make himself, one day, our master, either to hand us over to the court, and govern us in its name, or to crush both king and people, and build upon their ruins a legalized tyranny, the worst of all despotisms'.

Two features in this declaration of policy call for special comment. The first is Robespierre's repudiation of republicanism, and his attempt to saddle it upon the *Brissotin* party. This had been his policy, now, for nine months; and it is to be noted that his friend Desmoulins, in the first number of his new paper, only three weeks before, had rather abruptly adopted the same attitude.¹ The paradoxical result was that an insurrection of the people against the throne was organized in the name of the Constitution, and that republicanism was charged against the political party whose overthrow was to usher in the Republic. It was a clever manoeuvre, based upon the conviction (fundamental to all Robespierre's policy) that the forces of reaction were still terribly to be feared, and that a repetition of the events of July

¹Aulard, 181.

would be fatal to the prospects of a people's revolution.

The other comment concerns Robespierre's war policy. It is prudent; it is clear-sighted; it looks beyond the immediate struggle to its ultimate effects on the state: but it has nothing to inspire or capture the crowd, and seems to lead back into the dreary maze of denunciation and proscription from which, at any rate, the war offered a means of escape.

Moreover in one point it was certain to incur the criticism of practical soldiers, as Robespierre was well aware, when he devoted the first twenty pages of his second number (May 24) to an article entitled *Sur la nécessité et la nature de la discipline militaire*. 'Discipline', he here admits, 'is the soul of an army; without it an army ceases to exist'. But what is discipline? The soldier is also a citizen and a man; and each of his three capacities carries certain obligations. But the soldier's circle of duty falls inside the citizen's, and the citizen's inside the man's. Military discipline affects what falls within the inmost and smallest circle, but no more. Thus a soldier off duty is the equal of his officer, and can behave as any other citizen, wear the tricolor badge, sing patriotic songs, and share in popular rejoicings. Very well; but can he insult his captain, or murder his general? That was the real issue, and that Robespierre carefully avoids. In any case his concentric circles of rights and duties were far too theoretical.¹ Political experience had already shown that it was impossible to govern a state in which the rights of man were extended to every citizen. Military experience would soon show that it was impossible to control an army in which every soldier enjoyed the rights of a citizen. Nevertheless there was, underlying these exaggerations, the notion of a democratic and voluntary discipline, already applied by the Paris Sections to their detachments of the National Guard, and destined to pass, from them, into the organization of the armies of Valmy and Austerlitz.

¹On these principles, argues Rivarol, an unfaithful wife might say to her husband, 'I was a virgin before I was a wife', or 'I belonged to myself before I belonged to you' (*Mémoires*, 237).

Meanwhile the course of events was hurrying on towards an end which no one could clearly foresee, but which could hardly be other than catastrophic.

On May 12 the Girondist and Feuillant parties combined to organize a *Fête de la Loi*, in honour of Simoneau, mayor of Étampes, who had been lynched by a mob when trying to carry out the decrees for the regulation of food-prices. This rather childish counter-blast to the Châteaueux fête was ridiculed by Robespierre, who had private information as to Simoneau's local reputation, and who always refused to believe that the people could be in the wrong.¹ Indeed, the names of those who organized the fête, the crowding of the streets with soldiers, and the inscription on the emblematical 'throne of law'—*Liberté, Égalité, Propriété*—cast considerable doubt upon the democratic character of the occasion.

The disunity of the country, and the struggle between political parties, soon became the background of every debate at the Jacobins. Now Robespierre is protesting against the arrest of Merlin, Chabot, and Basire on a charge of libelling Bertrand and Montmorin;² now drawing up an address with Dufourny and Billaud-Varenne; now expressing sympathy with Lecointre, commandant of the National Guard at Versailles, during his imprisonment by order of the Assembly; now supporting the complaints of some villagers near Saint-Malo against their magistrates. Soon we find that the club itself is split into hostile sections. The title 'Friends of the Constitution', Robespierre maintains, has become a farce. It would be better to admit no new societies to affiliation 'until the society has restored the necessary order within its own ranks'. Indeed, so bitterly was this position felt that, on May 27, John Oswald, the representative of the Patriotic Society of Manchester,

¹Robespierre's informant was Pierre Dolivier, curé of Mauchamp. (*Défenseur*, No. 4; A.R. 9/371. cp. Mathiez, *La Vie Chère* 66 f; and the Mauchamp petition in Tourneux I 3204.)

²Denouncing this outrage, Robespierre oddly declared that 'in England the law allows a citizen to kill any policeman who tries to arrest him'.

found his eloquence received with disparaging remarks by Robespierre, and the affiliation he asked for indefinitely postponed.¹

Three days later the sordid business of denunciation was again in full swing. The three generals of the Northern Command—Luckner, Rochambeau, and Lafayette—had agreed, at a conference at Valenciennes on May 18, to suspend hostilities. Lafayette had gone further, and treated with the Austrians for an armistice, intending to march on Paris, disperse the Jacobins, recall the royal princes and *émigrés*, disband the National Guard, and establish a Second Chamber. In one letter he had even proposed himself for a dictatorship. All this was not, of course, known to Robespierre. But the Jacobin club was in correspondence with the administrative bodies of the Departments in which fighting was going on, and would have its suspicions of what was taking place.² When, therefore, Rochambeau, hurrying back from the front to justify himself, threw the blame for the reverses at Mons and Tournai partly upon the Ministers, and partly upon his men, Robespierre retorted that the real fault lay with the excessive powers of the generals, and contrasted Rochambeau's desertion of his post, to come to Paris, with his own resignation of an easy job (that of Public Prosecutor) to take up the dangerous and painful task of denouncing the enemies of the country. Rochambeau, baited beyond endurance, left the hall, and his name was struck off the list of members. It was one of the first of many such incidents.

The next day appeared the third number of the *Défenseur*, with a bitter article entitled *Considérations sur l'une des principales causes de nos maux*. It began with a sentence which showed how far the events of the last nine months had distorted Robespierre's judgement. 'Intrigue', he wrote, parodying an aphorism from Pascal,³ 'is the Queen of the world'; and 'might is right' means 'trickery is right'. To this rule, he says, the Revolution is no exception; and there

¹R.F. 32/481.

²*L'opinion est la reine du monde, la force en est le tyran.*

³e.g. Corresp. 311.

would be no hope, were it not still true that 'the people is sound, the cause of mankind is holy, and Heaven is just'. The real enemies of the country, he reiterates, are not to be found in the royalist party, but amongst professed patriots; and since he holds it a duty to criticize publicly, he names Brissot and Condorcet, Guadet, Vergniaud, and Gensonné, accusing them of violating the rights of the nation, and depraving the public spirit towards despotism and aristocracy. Hamel, whilst admitting that he would have preferred his hero 'calm and stoical', thinks that a perusal of this article will 'convince the reader afresh of the clarity and depth of Robespierre's judgement'. It is rather the utterance of a man whom opposition and suspicion have so embittered that he mistakes private resentment for public duty. Its clarity and depth are accidents of its narrowness.

However, a week's holiday¹ did something to restore Robespierre's balance of mind, before the crisis created by the approach of another July 14. Servan, the new Minister of War,² was proposing that, in place of the usual peaceful delegations, each canton in the country should send up five volunteers, ready armed and uniformed, to take the civic oath, and to form part of a reserve army of 20,000 men encamped in the northern suburbs of Paris. This project was differently interpreted according to the hopes and fears of each political party. To the Royalists it seemed a threat against the throne—the more so, since the Assembly had recently disbanded the king's *Garde Constitutionnelle*, and had only allowed him to reconstitute a small part of his personal body-guard.³ To the Feuillants it was a blow against the counter-revolution; to the Girondins a safeguard against the city mob; to some Parisians a bulwark against invasion, to others a menace to their independence. On the day before Servan's bill was passed by the Assembly (June 7), Robespierre at the Jacobins gave his reasons against it. Paris, he said, had nothing to fear from internal

¹There is no sign of his presence at the club between May 30 and June 6.

²In place of Grave, who resigned on May 8.

³Decrees of May 29 and June 8.

enemies which it could not deal with by its own efforts. The proposal was a dangerous one, because the new army was evidently designed to take the place of the National Guard, and to put the capital and the country at the mercy of the reactionaries. Indeed, he thought so strongly about the matter that he put aside all his constitutional scruples,¹ and seriously discussed petitioning the Assembly to rescind its decree. 'The National Assembly being subordinate to the General Will', he now declares, 'so soon as it acts contrary to that Will, ceases to exist'. Such an argument really left no assembly to petition: it pointed straight to the remedy which was now in everyone's mind, and which, to Robespierre himself, seemed the only way of escape from a military dictatorship—the complete abolition of the present regime. But he does not seem to have realized that Servan's army might well prove just what he most desired—a safeguard for Paris against the *coup de main* of some ambitious general.

However this may be, there is evidence in No. 4 of the *Défenseur*—*Observations sur les causes morales de notre situation actuelle*—that the fear of a military dictatorship is driving Robespierre back to the first principles of revolutionism. 'The issue of the Revolution', he writes, 'is quite simple, and is unaffected by changes of form. If the old abuses persist under new names, if the new forms of government are no better than the old, if there is to be no breaking of the entail of slavery and oppression, what do I care whether we have a dictator or a king, a parliament or a senate, tribunes or consuls? The sole aim of society being the preservation of the imprescriptible rights of man, the only proper motive of a revolution should be to recall society to this holy end, and to recover these rights from the usurpations of tyranny and force'. Robespierre sees that the Revolution has declined from this high ideal, and asks why. He finds the answer in its failure to be true to 'those principles of justice and morality which lie at the root of human society'. But how is one to know what they are? They are written in the soul of man, and can be read by

¹v. e.g. July 16, 1791.

'him who has a pure heart and a virtuous character'. This evangelical precept seems for a moment to open wide the door of salvation; but, with his curious fixity of mind, Robespierre half closes it again, by reiterating his theory that 'the people, the huge class of workers', have a monopoly of virtue. Being the least cultivated part of society, they are also, according to the gospel of Rousseau, the least depraved. In other words—and this is the heart of Robespierre's convictions—the Revolution has failed because it has not been directed by and for the common people. It is not a programme of political reform which is now wanted, but a moral reformation. And this will be achieved, not by parliamentarism, which has failed, but by the direct action of the people, working through its autonomous Sections and Communes, towards a new legislature elected on a universal franchise.

VI

The next move towards catastrophe came from the king's side. On June 13 he dismissed the *Brissotin* Ministers, Roland, Servan and Clavière, and transferred Dumouriez to the Ministry of War. On the 15th the Assembly showed its resentment by passing a vote of condolence with the dismissed Ministers. The king retaliated by refusing his consent to the Paris camp, and to a decree against the refractory priests. On the 16th Dumouriez, finding his isolation intolerable, followed his colleagues into retirement. On the 17th the Assembly set up an emergency Committee of Twelve to deal with the crisis which was now rapidly approaching.

It was characteristic of Robespierre that, as the crucial moment drew near, he should go more and more warily, detaching himself from all political parties, disowning any definite programme, and waiting to see how the situation would develop. This is the explanation of his speech at the club on June 13. 'Since the end of the Constituent Assembly', he informs his hearers, 'I have been pretty assiduous

in my attendance at this society'—as though he were not its most prominent member!—'in the belief that good citizens are not out of place in patriotic assemblies, capable of exercising a salutary influence upon the progress of an enlightened public spirit; and I have done so as one equally opposed, both to the avowed enemies and to the unavowed corrupters of democracy'. If he is not committed to the club, neither does he hold any brief for the dismissed Ministers: there are more important things to worry about. 'Our safety does not depend upon the fate of any Minister, but upon our faithfulness to principles, the progress of public spirit, and the wisdom of our laws . . . I recognize no principles but those of the public interest; I desire acquaintance with no Minister; I take no man's word as reason either for enthusiasm or for indignation; certainly not that of men who have more than once been deceived, and who, within the space of a week, contradict themselves so flagrantly'.

'*Perfide incomparable*,' is Jaurès' comment on this speech.¹ But why should Robespierre show any consideration for Ministers of whose policy and conduct he disapproved? It is more blameworthy that, at the moment when his policy is bearing fruit, he should disclaim responsibility for anything but the merest generalizations, and should pose as a privileged critic, who has never demeaned himself to the political stage. If we were dealing with anyone but 'the Incorruptible', we might credit the suggestion of sordid motives for this apparent change of front. Westermann, at his trial, alleged that he had been offered three million *livres* to join the court party on the eve of August 10th. Fabre was accused, and Danton suspected, of accepting similar bribes.² Robespierre afterwards hinted that attempts had been made to corrupt him too.³ But it is difficult to believe either that he was offered the tutorship of the Dauphin, through the mediation of the Princesse de Lamballe⁴, or

¹Jaurès, 4/35.

²In the Convention, Sept. 25, 1792.

³A.R. 9/398.

⁴A.R. 7/298. The story comes from Harmand de la Meuse (v. 1/237 n.), and Seiffert, the Princess's doctor.

that court money was wasted on bribing occupants of the public galleries to applaud his speeches.¹

No; Robespierre's policy may have been unheroic, but it was honest, and unobscure. It was to stand by the Constitution, and to trust the people, until it was clear whether the people would destroy the Constitution, or the Constitution the people. The first solution was what he hoped for, but would not openly proclaim. The second was what he feared, for it could hardly lead to anything but a military dictatorship, and the destruction of all his hopes for a popular regime; but he was not the man to designate himself as the first victim of a Fayettist proscription. Such was his reputation, that this policy, which in another might have been reckoned cowardly, passed for caution; and, as he had saved the Jacobin club by repudiating republicanism in the crisis of last July, so now a policy of masterly inactivity enabled him to save the cause of the people. Whilst other popular leaders are organizing an armed deputation to the Manège, or to the Tuileries, whilst Réal is demanding the suspension of the king, and Danton the queen's exile, he can only fall back on denunciations of Lafayette,² and appeal to a discredited Constitution. He plays no part in, and makes no mention of, the events of June 20—the work of certain Sections of the East End, backed by the National Guard, and abetted by his old friend and new enemy, Pétion, the mayor of Paris.³

However, June 20 settled nothing; whilst the king's refusal to be intimidated, and some consequential royalist demonstrations in the provinces, discredited the *Brissotins*, and transferred the initiative from them to the Robespierrist Sections, and to the *Fédérés*, who were gathering in the capital for the fête of July 14. Thus Robespierre's failure to

¹So Cloots, writing to a friend not long before August 10. 'Suspend the Civil List', he says, 'and both our Kings (Louis and Robespierre) will come tumbling down'. (Tuetey, 10/2477.)

²e.g., at the Jacobins on June 18, and in *Défenseur*, No. 6.

³Mathiez (153) asserts that 'by Robespierre's advice the deputies of the Mountain took no part in the demonstration'; but on what authority? The converse story, that he was seen with Pétion, Manuel, and Sillery at Santerre's house, planning the rising, rests on worthless evidence (Tuetey, 4/733).

lead, at a moment when all leadership was discredited, passed for the highest statesmanship.

A week later (June 28) Lafayette appeared in the Manège, denounced the Jacobins as 'a sect which violates the national sovereignty, and tyrannizes over the citizens', and called upon the nation to support the Assembly and the throne. This *démarche* did more credit to the general's courage than to his good sense: for, while Louis refused his help, the Jacobins thrived on his accusations, and presented themselves to the people as its one hope against a conspiracy of the army, the constitutionalists, and the court. Not only so. Lafayette had shown his hand. The chances of a successful military *coup* were hopelessly compromised. Robespierre could join even with Brissot and Guadet in denouncing one who had openly declared war on the Revolution; and thenceforward devoted himself to forwarding the 'constitutional rising against the Constitution', which came to a head on August 10. Both his enemies had played into his hands.

VII

The beginning of July brought more bad news from the front. Vergniaud, for the Girondins, denounced the king's conduct of the war, demanded his deposition, and proposed the declaration of a state of national emergency (July 3). But he did not carry the Assembly with him; and a theatrical reconciliation of all parties ('Lamourette's Kiss', July 7) gave, for a few hours, a false sense of security. The same evening, however, Pétion and Manuel (*Procureur de la Commune*) were arrested by the *Directoire du Département de Paris* for their complicity in the events of June 20; and on the 11th the Assembly at last published its dramatic appeal *Citoyens, la Patrie est en danger!*, and France armed for self-defence.¹

Now that Lafayette has been discredited, and the people are taking charge of the situation, Robespierre can adopt a more hopeful view of the war. Speaking on July 7, he

¹The official proclamation was not till Sunday the 22nd.

admits that he had at first thought the war could not serve the cause of liberty: now he thinks it can. He had thought the country unfit to fight; and events proved him right. Now he believes that, if treacherous generals are removed, and patriots appointed in their place, victory can be secured. He announces, with more enthusiasm than logic, that there are two kinds of war—those of liberty, waged by peoples, and those of intrigue and ambition, waged by despots: the first are instantly and gloriously successful, the second futile and disastrous. This war has so far been disastrous: it is therefore of the second kind. ‘We have not been able to free others (he continues, more sensibly) because we are not yet free ourselves. The universe is still in travail with liberty; we still bear the scars of our old chains’. But if we can destroy despotism at home (the inference is), defeat abroad will turn to victory.¹

Two days later Robespierre’s address *Aux Fédérés* is even more explicit.² Their mission, he says, is to save the state by maintaining the Constitution—not the whole Constitution as drafted in 1791, but ‘such laws as protect liberty and patriotism against tyranny and machiavellianism’. And how are they to do this? His premises can lead to only one conclusion—by the overthrow of the King and of the Assembly, for and by whom the reactionary elements were introduced into the Constitution. And though he is careful not to say this, the incitement to revenge is as clearly intended as it was by Mark Antony. ‘The fatal hour is striking (he writes); . . . let us march to the field of Federation. There stands the altar of the country’. But there must be no idols now, as there were in 1790—no Lafayette, no Louis XVI. ‘Let us take no oath but to the country and to ourselves; and let us take it at the hands (not of the king of France, but) of the immortal King of Nature, who made us for liberty, and who punishes our oppressors’. On this spot everything recalls their crimes—this soil stained with the innocent blood they shed; this altar; this (not

¹*Défenseur*, No. 8, delivered as a speech at the Jacobins on July 11.

²*Défenseur*, No. 9.

Champ de Mars, but) *champ de mort*, covered with a funeral pall. 'Listen, then, to the piteous cries of our murdered citizens; see the blood-stained country before your eyes; gaze on mankind crushed beneath the yoke of a few despicable tyrants; and let this spectacle inspire you with great thoughts'. What thoughts does he mean? 'Do not leave this enclosure till you have resolved in your hearts on the salvation of France and of the human race'. Could anyone doubt that for 'great thoughts' they were meant to read 'vengeance on the King'; or for 'the salvation of France and of the human race', the overthrow of the crown, and of the Assembly? And yet so sensitive was Robespierre of appearances, and so anxious to preserve his political innocence, that he denounced the *Journal du soir* for saying that he had incited the Marseillais to avenge the victims of last July, and had the author of the report expelled from the club.¹

But if some reticence must be exercised in public, there need be none at the club. On July 13, after welcoming the Assembly's reinstatement of Pétion,² Robespierre followed Chabot and other speakers in warning the Jacobins that a fresh plot was being hatched. In 1789, he said, when Lafayette wanted an excuse for martial law, he had a baker murdered; in 1791 he connived at the king's flight, and hanged two men on the Champ de Mars, in order to bring discredit on the Jacobins; June 20 was another of his intrigues; and now Louis XVI is no more than the puppet and victim of a man who is equally ready to act as his valet or as his hired assassin, so long as he can remain in power. The biographer must record, however regretfully, these absurd and malicious charges. Robespierre must have known—to say nothing of the other allegations—that Lafayette could not be responsible for the murder of the baker François, or for the events of June

¹Aulard (H.P. 201) takes this address as suggesting nothing more than Constitutional reform, and as silently discountenancing the demand for the king's dethronement; but (apart from other difficulties) he has to admit that this involves a change of mind on Robespierre's part before the *Pétition des Fédérés* of July 17 (v. 1/253).

²He had been afraid that the king might gain credit by doing this (*Défenseur*, 9/431).

20, which he had so recently denounced. That he could seriously voice such slanders shows a fevered mind. There was, after all, something which could corrupt 'the Incorruptible'—not money, not even ambition, but hatred of those whom he considered traitors to the cause.

The address *Aux Fédérés* was denounced to the Public Prosecutor; but July 14 passed off quietly, though no cheers were heard for the king, and many of the crowd had *Vive Pétion* chalked on their hats. The attack on the Tuileries was postponed. Meanwhile, Robespierre exhorts all good citizens to treat the *Fédérés* as 'friends, brothers, and deliverers'; public opinion must be organized, and the patriot forces mobilized, both in Paris and on the frontiers, for a final attack on the enemy at home and abroad.¹

On July 20 Robespierre sent to his friend Couthon, who was taking a mud-cure for his rheumatism at Saint-Amand, a valuable account of the situation. Paris, he says, is on the edge of great events. The people are indignant at the exculpation of Lafayette, just voted by the Assembly.² The king's deposition is to be discussed to-day, and everything points to a night of disorder. 'The revolution is embarking', he says, 'on a more rapid course, unless it is engulfed in a military despotism and dictatorship. In the present situation it is impossible for the friends of freedom to foresee and to direct events. The destiny of France seems to be abandoning her to intrigue and chance.'³ The hopeful element in the situation is the strength of public opinion in Paris, and many of the Departments, and the justice of our cause. The Paris Sections are manifesting an energy and prudence worthy to serve as a model to the rest of the country'.⁴

A week later Robespierre is ready for the most drastic measures, accepting Camus' proposals for the 'permanence' of the primary assemblies, a house to house search for arms, and the deposition of the king, his ministers, and his generals, and adding as a corollary the general arming of

¹Jac. 4/120, 125.

²July 19.

³Destiny or Providence, hitherto identified with Chance (v. 1/215).

⁴Corresp. 149.

the people. He is evidently prepared for another *insurrection générale*, like that of July, 1789. And it is clear, from an important speech he delivers on the 29th, that this rising is to be directed not only against the Executive, but also against the Legislature; for if it is the king who is trying to destroy the nation, it is the Assembly which is failing to save it; and if the king must be deposed, the Assembly must also be replaced.¹ There must be no repetition of what happened after Varennes.

It is significant that this speech should have coincided with the first meeting (July 26) of the *comité central des fédérés*, and with the appointment of the *bureau central des sections* (July 27)—the two bodies which organized the rising of August 10. Without being a member of either, Robespierre was evidently in touch with both. The *comité des fédérés* seems indeed to have formed, within itself, a *directoire secret*, which sometimes met in the rooms of Anthoine, mayor of Metz, a personal friend of Robespierre, and at this time lodging with the Duplays. Simond of Strasbourg, a correspondent of Robespierre, was also a member of this inner circle, until he returned home on August 8. But, after abortive attempts to bring about a rising on July 26, July 30, and August 5, the initiative seems to have passed from the *directoire* to the *bureau des sections*; and Robespierre may have been less directly informed as to the later developments of the plot.²

On July 30 two events were a prelude to the final crisis—the arrival of the Marseillais, and the publication of Brunswick's Manifesto. Robespierre, as *mandataire* of Marseille, can have had no illusions as to the object with which the Marseillais came to Paris. 'Frenchmen prepared

¹One of the Brest *Fédérés* says (describing the assembly on August 8) that at this time decrees were debated by 2 or 3 members, and voted by 20 or 30. The 'Opposition' read the papers, and paid little attention to business (A.R. 33/451).

²Carra, a not very trustworthy witness, after saying that Robespierre took no part in the conspirators' meetings at the *Soleil d'Or* on July 26 and at the *Cadran Bleu* on August 4, adds that, when the latter was adjourned to Antoine's rooms the same evening, Mme Duplay was alarmed, and said, 'Did they want to get Robespierre killed?' 'It doesn't concern him', replied Antoine; 'he has only to hide himself'. (B. and R. 16/271, cp. A.R. 12/389.)

to play Brutus' part', he calls them in a letter to Buissart, probably written the same day; and he adds, 'If they leave Paris without saving the country, all is lost. We all intend to lay down our lives in the capital, rather than shrink from risking everything in a final attempt'.¹ As to Brunswick's Manifesto, it chanced that Robespierre was in the chair when Mendoza read this document to the club,² and, being by now in the confidence of the committees which were planning the insurrection, he was anxious to prevent any premature move. The 'platitudes and stupidities' of the manifesto were, indeed, greeted with 'roars of laughter,' and with exclamations less of anger than of pity for the benighted ignorance and foolishness, 'at least ten centuries out of date', that characterized the document. But when, a little later, the meeting was thrown into some agitation by the sound of drums beating to quarters, Robespierre first recommended calmness, and then suspended the sitting—a piece of caution for which he was subsequently attacked in the Brissotin *Club de Réunion*, whose members doubtless felt that the control of events was being taken out of their hands.³ On August 1 Robespierre explained a further step in the plans for the rising. The overthrow of the king and the Assembly was to be followed by the election of a National Convention, from which members of both previous Assemblies should be excluded. This body would sit for a year, and frame a new Constitution.⁴ Two days later this proposal was embodied in a petition from forty-seven Sections presented by Pétion to the Assembly. It was a suggestion which, with its embodiment of the 'Self-denying Ordinance,' can hardly have come from anyone but Robespierre. Fundamentally, throughout the crisis, a 'defender of the Constitution,' he pinned his hopes now, as he had

¹Corresp. 151.

²It was dated July 25, known in Paris on the 28th, and read for the first time at the Jacobins on the 30th.

³For the *Club de Réunion* v. Mathiez, *G. et M.*, 70.

⁴Prudhomme said afterwards (*Histoire Impartiale* (1824) 3/189) that Danton, Fabre, and Desmoulins consulted him, about the end of July, as to what step should follow the deposition of the king. Robespierre's plan for a Convention was not then his own? Jaurès (4/103) calls it *ce grand programme*.

done a year earlier, on a new National Assembly. The appeal to force, quite uncongential to him, would thus be justified. The Revolution would pass from one stage of legality to another, through the thinnest possible veil of unconstitutionality.

VIII

As the moment planned for the rising became imminent, there were fears lest the victims should anticipate it by flight. On August 5, with some inkling, perhaps, of Lafayette's latest plan for the king's flight, Robespierre told the club that he had been informed that the Tuileries was full of Suisses, who had been treated to drinks, and given fifteen cartridges each, with which to defend the palace against attack; meanwhile, Louis would certainly try to escape; and it was the duty of every good citizen to see that he was safely guarded. On the 8th fears were expressed lest the Assembly might transfer its sittings from Paris to Rouen or Orleans. Robespierre, however, advised the club not to be distracted by this unlikely rumour from the primary issue—that of the king's dethronement. This was his last public utterance before August 10.

There must, however, have been constant conferences with the persons immediately concerned in the rising, or likely to oppose it. In his 7th *Lettre à ses Commettans*, Robespierre reminds Pétion, how, on August 7, the latter talked to him for a whole hour about the dangers of the insurrection, and urged that it should be postponed until the Assembly had had time to discuss the king's deposition. There was also the preparatory campaign which Robespierre believed to be necessary for the success of the coming attack—educating public opinion, and working up feeling against the enemies on the home front. Here the *Défenseur* played a leading part. Now it was a *Pétition des Fédérés à l'Assemblée nationale*; now an article *Sur la fédération de 1792*; now an address from *les citoyens réunis à Paris . . . aux français des 83 départements*; now a disquisition *Des maux et des ressources de l'état*; and now a notice *Sur l'armée des*

Marseillais à Paris.¹ All these writings—petitions and addresses included—were apparently by Robespierre's own hand; all reinforce his point of view. Thus the *Fédérés* insist that they set out to fight the Austrians, and now they find Austria in Paris itself: 'it is in our camps, it is in the king's council, it is at the head of our armies'. Again, 'A treacherous court, a coalition of insolent aristocrats (*patriciens*, one of Robespierre's favourite words), a vile crowd of criminals of all kinds, who have the Constitution on their lips, but tyranny and assassination in their hearts—such are the enemies of the country; and it is at Paris that they must be encountered. At Paris, then, we must conquer or die: here we have sworn to remain: here is our post—the scene of our triumph, or of our tomb'.² But they are warned to go warily, to beware of premature violence—a trick used by Lafayette and his friends to discredit the Revolution—and to explore the possibilities of constitutional action, unless or until public opinion is ready for unconstitutional remedies.

As the days go on, Robespierre grows less cautious, and more clear. His mercurial mind moves with the rising temperature of the people. *Défenseur* No. 11 assumes that there is to be an insurrection, and discussed its scope and aim. He has now thrown over his last constitutional scruples. 'The state must be saved', he writes, 'whatever means be employed: nothing can be called unconstitutional, except what tends to its destruction.' Nor is it enough to depose the king. A bad legislature is more dangerous than a bad king, because it can count on a greater degree of popular support. Besides, it is not Louis who reigns, but the succession of intriguers who rule through him; and at the moment 'your real kings are your generals'. What is the use, then, of replacing Louis by another king, a Regent, or a Council? Or what advantage is it, if the Legislative Body becomes the Executive also? 'Despotism is still despotism, whether it have 700 heads, or one.' The only

¹*Défenseur*, No. 10 and No. 11.

²*Défenseur*, No. 10.

remedy, then, is a National Convention, which will reform such of the present laws as are contrary to the Constitution of 1791 (he means, in its original form), and institute new provisions so simple and obvious that they will be at once adopted—depriving the Executive of the means of corruption, making the deputies answerable to the people, and abolishing any veto on legislation. Finally, when all is ready for the attack, the responsibility for it must be shifted on to the shoulders of the court; and this will not be difficult, in view of the rumours that are going round as to the arming of the Tuileries. Indeed, Robespierre has by now persuaded himself, in common with most of the popular leaders, that the contemplated rising is merely an act of self-defence against a treacherous attack on Paris by the armed forces of counter-revolution.

IX

When the work of the diplomatists ends, that of the soldiers begins; and it is unreasonable to reproach Robespierre for not marching with Santerre, on August 10, to the attack of the Tuileries. Neither did Danton. Many narratives exist of the events of that day, and it is possible to reconstruct with tolerable certainty the gathering of the *Fédérés* and Sectional Guards, the order of march, the stages of the attack, the storming of the palace, the capture or massacre of its defenders, and the retreat of the royal family to the hall of the Assembly. Eye-witnesses—one of the most vivid, an English visitor to Paris¹—have described the scenes in the streets, the Carrousel, and the Tuileries gardens—the wrecking of the royal apartments, the stripping and burning of the bodies of the dead *Suisses*, and the home-coming of the volunteers, with scraps of royalist uniforms fluttering on their blood-stained bayonets. But the most elaborate inquiry into the horrible and heroic incidents of the day² has not discovered a single trace of Robespierre. His enemies afterwards accused him of

¹Dr. John Moore, *Diary*, cp. Millingen, *Recollections of Republican France*, 1/119.

²e.g. Mathiez, *Le dix Août* (1931).

hiding, as they had done a year ago.¹ His admirers secured him the medal that was given to all members of the Commune who had taken part in the destruction of tyranny.² Both were beside the mark. Robespierre probably stayed at home, as most people did that day, prompted by natural caution, and incapacity for violence. From the house in the *rue Saint-Honoré* he could see the crowds coming and going, hear the sounds of firing a street or two away, and easily keep himself informed of every turn in the events.

But in the evening the Jacobin club meets as usual; and, as usual, Robespierre is there, manuscript in hand, ready with appropriate reflections on the events of the day. It is to be noticed that he ignores the king: monarchy or republic is not, to him, the issue of the day; that problem can be left to settle itself later. Instead, he advises the people to guard against any attempt of their own representatives to exploit the situation in the interests of reaction; to demand, therefore, the replacement of the Assembly by a National Convention; to exact a decree for the dismissal and condemnation of Lafayette; and not to disarm until they have secured their liberties. Meanwhile, commissioners should be sent to every part of France, to explain what has happened; the *Fédérés* should write home to those who sent them; and the Sections 'should inform the National Assembly of the real requirements of the people, and, in order to be better informed on this head, should . . . admit to their meetings all citizens, without distinction of class'. Finally, legal steps should ~~be~~ taken to secure the release of all imprisoned patriots.

What is most clear in this programme is the intention of the Commune (i.e. the amalgamated Sections of Paris) to dominate the situation which its successful rising has created. This is, indeed, the clue to all the events of the next six weeks. A dethroned king, a broken Constitution, a discredited Assembly that tries to save its face by a series of illegal acts (the suspension of the king, the replacement

¹e.g. Vergniaud said he hid in a cellar, and wanted to fly to Marseillé (B. and R. 25/365, 369, 376).

²Fleischmann, 147.

of the Ministers; the summoning of a Convention, and the granting of manhood suffrage), and a newly-appointed council of time-serving Ministers—all are impotent in face of the Insurrectional Commune. The men of the hour are the men who have the confidence of the Paris crowd; obscure persons, for the most part, unknown to the historians; but they made history.¹

Robespierre treasured amongst his papers a letter which he received from one Janegon on July 19, but which loses little of its appropriateness when read in connexion with August 10. 'All brave Frenchmen', it ran, 'appreciate with me the value of your untiring efforts in the cause of freedom. Through my voice they salute you—Blessed be Robespierre, the worthy follower of Brutus! They all rely upon your incorruptible zeal, and upon the courage which gives the noble impulses of your burning and generous patriotism so many claims to honour. A civic crown and a triumph are your due: they only await the time when civic incense rises before the altar that we shall raise to you, and that posterity will adore, so long as men realize the value of freedom.'²

There exists a medal designed by Dupré to commemorate the revolution of August 10, bearing the inscription, *Régénération française—10 août, 1792*. It shows a fountain in female form with water flowing from the breasts: a patriot stoops to drink from a cup held by a standing figure; it is that of Robespierre.³

The image is just. Robespierre was no Moses, to strike water out of a rock, or to slay the Egyptian. He was too self-centred, too calculating, to be disobedient to the voice from the burning bush. But his very scrupulousness made him the ideal cup-bearer—the man who waited on every gift of a fickle, but on the whole French Providence, and handed it on to the Chosen People. He disliked war, as

¹The names of the members of the *Conseil Général de la Commune* nominated on the night of August 9–10 are given in *Brit. Mus. F. 61*.*

²Courtois, *Rapport, pièce justificatif*, No. 24 (not in Michon's *Corresp.*). Courtois suppressed the date, and the word *civic*, to give the impression that Robespierre had been offered a royal crown (A.R. 49/65).

³Buffenoir in A.R. 1/457.

he disliked all violence. The statesmen who made it and the generals who waged it were, he well knew, grasping at power. Whatever its results abroad, its effects at home would transform the Revolution. The crisis of 1791 had shown that it was still uncertain whether the great national rising of 1789 would result in any permanent betterment of the lot of the people. The war of 1792, whether it resulted in victory or in defeat, might very well consummate a reaction which had already begun, and crush the newly won liberties under a military despotism. He could not force the situation: he could only wait upon its developments, and hope to retrieve something of his designs from the general disaster. His methods, indeed, were not those of a strong, or generous, or straightforward man. His bitter denunciation of the politicians who were planning and of the soldiers who were conducting the war; his use of a Constitution in which he did not believe to discredit a party working, like himself, towards its destruction; his covert incitements to a violence which he was the first to avoid and to disown; and the halo of martyrdom with which he encircled himself; make it as difficult for his biographer as it was for his contemporaries to tolerate the constant irritation of his speech and print. But the fact remains that, when the *Brissotin* government failed, and the throne fell, and every attempt at a despotism was discredited, the Insurrectional Commune, the embodiment of Robespierre's plan for a popular revolution, was left master of the state. ~~It~~ was not his work: it was, as he would have said, a gift of Providence, or of Chance. But no single man had hoped for it, worked for it, or talked about it, as he had; and when the slow gropings of his policy at last brought him to the point of achievement, he could deservedly be hailed, if not as a great leader of the people, at any rate as an unerring interpreter of the times.

CHAPTER IX

THE REVOLUTIONIST (AUGUST-SEPTEMBER, 1792)

I

THE Insurrectional Commune, which found itself in power as a result of the insurrection of August 10, was a body of 288 members, formed by the election of six representatives from each of the forty-eight Sections of Paris. Robespierre joined this body, as a representative of the Place Vendôme Section (or *Section des Piques*), on the 11th. He had already shown, by his speech at the Jacobins the night before, that he fully grasped the significance of the victory which had been won, not merely by the nation over the king, but also by Paris over France; for the point of view of the provincial *fédérés* was soon forgotten by those who had exploited it in the interests of the Commune. He had shown, too, that he looked to the insurgents to hold the ground won, and to safeguard popular liberties, until a National Convention came into being. He was now in a position to work directly for these ends. Between August 12 and 26 he was constant in his attendance at the Commune; after that date, first as president of the *assemblée primaire* of his Section, and then as a member of the *assemblée électroale* of Paris, he was still in close touch with the leaders of the Commune.

Now for the first time he appeared, as the spokesman of popular delegations, before the legislature from which he had voluntarily excluded himself; and, seeing the state of apprehension to which the Assembly was reduced, he would have been less than human if he had not enjoyed the situation. On August 12, and again on the 22nd, he petitioned the House for the abolition of the *directoire* of the Department of Paris, which he and his friends had never forgiven for its encouragement of the royal veto, or for its

suspension of Pétion and Manuel.¹ But the Assembly still had independence enough to resist this demand.

Again, on August 14 Robespierre led through the House a deputation of his own Section, and proposed, in a patriotic harangue, that the space left by the demolition of Louis XVI's statue, in the Place Vendôme, should be filled by a monument in honour of the citizens who had fallen on August 10.² This time the deputies cheered the proposal, and in due time a statue of Liberty appeared on the site, to be followed, at not infrequent intervals, by other monuments equally expressive of the political temper of the moment.³

The following day Robespierre reappeared with five other members of the Commune, on a weightier errand. The moderate casualties suffered by the victors of August 10 had created a demand for vengeance that was not satisfied by the slaughter of some 800 royalists. Santerre had promised that the survivors would be brought to trial, and Pétion had said that the scope of the tribunal should be extended to all enemies of the Revolution. Yet, after several days' delay, the Assembly had merely resolved to bring the surviving *Suisses* before a court-martial. It was against this decision that Robespierre's delegation protested, demanding the erection of a special court, appointed by the Sections, and having jurisdiction, without appeal, over the whole country. 'The people,' he said, 'is reposing, but it is not asleep. It wills—and rightly—the punishment of those who are to blame.' The Assembly at first refused, but was ultimately forced, by the threat of another insurrection, to give way.

This was a dangerous as well as an ungenerous move. Even if they could not regard the *Suisses* as soldiers who

¹v. 1/201, 247.

²Robespierre's original idea was to destroy the Tuileries, and erect a monument in its place (*Défenseur* 12/533).

³Liberty was replaced in 1806-10 by a towering Roman column, on the summit of which stood Napoleon as Caesar: in 1814 the Restoration took down Napoleon, and put up a gilt fleur-de-lys: in 1833 Louis Philippe restored Napoleon, but in a frock-coat; Napoleon III replaced a copy of the Caesarean figure; the Commune of 1871 pulled the whole thing to the ground; three years later the Third Republic put it up again.

had only done their duty in defending the Tuileries, the Parisians might have reflected that their own dead were sufficiently avenged by the victory they had won, and by the killing of more than twice as many of their opponents.¹ They showed too clearly that what they wanted was not justice, but revenge. Nor can Robespierre, who had suffered nothing in the fighting, who had made an apologia for the troops that fired on the crowd a year before, and who had hitherto found excellent arguments against recourse to special tribunals, be acquitted of pandering to the lower instincts of the people. Why did he? Probably less through concern for the punishment of royalists than through distrust of the old courts, and indignation with the attempts of the Assembly to obstruct the will of the people. But within a fortnight the prison massacres were to reflect a terrible responsibility on those who, on whatever grounds, had encouraged ideas of popular vengeance.

It may perhaps be held that Robespierre made some amends for his part in setting up a retaliatory tribunal by his refusal to act as one of its judges.² 'Ever since the beginning of the Revolution,' he wrote, explaining this decision, 'I have been fighting against the majority of those who are now accused of *lèse-nation*. Most of them I have denounced; and I have predicted their plots, at a time when others believed in their patriotism. I could not now act as judge over men I have opposed: I could not rightly forget that, if they were the country's enemies, they were also my own. This is a good rule in all cases: it is particularly applicable here; for popular justice ought to be worthy of the people; it should be as dignified as it is swift and formidable.'³ This scrupulousness does Robespierre credit; but one could believe in it more, if he were less concerned with his own feelings, and more with the injustice of

¹The official returns gave the number of those killed on the popular side as 376 (Tuetey, *Introd.* to Vol. 4). The royalist dead are given by Sagnac (*Lav.* 2/387) as 800.

²As the first judge appointed by the *corps électoral*, he would in fact have been President of the Court.

³From a letter to the *Courrier des 83 départements*, Aug. 24 (*Moniteur*, Aug. 28).

proceedings which, characteristically, he initiated, but did not carry out.

This was not the only judicial post that he declined. Ten days before (August 14) he had received a polite note from Danton, now Minister of Justice, asking his 'dear friend' to accept a place on the *conseil de justice* attached to the Ministry. The work would only occupy part of three mornings a week; he would have congenial colleagues (Bitonzé-Deslinières, Collot d'Herbois, and Barère); and he might regard it 'not as an appointment to public office, but simply as an additional opportunity for his heart and talents to combat the enemies of freedom, and to champion the cause of the unfortunate'.¹ Danton evidently remembered Robespierre's resignation of the post of Public Prosecutor, and knew that he would need some persuasion to accept any public appointment; but all his inducements were in vain. Robespierre was not to be flattered into accepting a post that would identify him with a transitory regime, and distract him from his immediate work for the Commune, and for the cause of the people. Besides, he was doubtless anxious to give no handle to his Girondist enemies, whom he had accused of place-seeking, and who were already crediting him with designs on a dictatorship.

II

The contest between the Assembly and the Commune soon came to a head over the question of the control of Paris. On August 13 Pétion, as mayor, informed the Commune that it was the intention of the Assembly, after ratifying the proceedings of the insurrectional body which had occupied the Town Hall on the night of August 9, to dissolve it, and to reinstate the Municipality that it had displaced. On the 17th Robespierre was commissioned by the Commune to interview Pétion, and to see whether he could be induced to give up this plan, and to co-operate

¹A.H. 7/187. The minute of the letter is in Fabre's hand (Danton's secretary). It is not in Michon's *Corresp.* The appointment was actually announced in the *Moniteur* of August 22.

with themselves in various measures admittedly necessary to preserve order, and prevent counter-revolution. This interview showed that the recent *rapprochement* between the two men had not outlasted August 10, and it led to no good result. Twelve days later the Assembly took advantage of the growing indiscipline of some of the Sections to decree the suspension of the new Commune, and the holding of fresh elections to replace it by a constitutional body. The Commune refused to disperse, and there was talk of a fresh insurrection; but Robespierre, cautious, as always, when it came to a contest with the Assembly, dissuaded his colleagues from such a move.

Three days after their interview of the 17th, Pétion sent a letter which has survived among Robespierre's papers, and which throws valuable light upon the relations between the two men. 'You know, my friend,' he writes, 'what my feelings are towards you: you know that I am no rival of yours, and that I have always given you proof of my devoted friendship. It would be idle to attempt to divide us; I could not cease to love you, unless you ceased to love liberty. I have always found more fault with you to your face than behind your back. When I think you too ready to take offence, or when I believe, rightly or wrongly, that you are mistaken about a line of action, I tell you so. You reproach me with being too trustful. You may be right; but you must not assume too readily that many of my acquaintances are your enemies. People can disagree on a number of unessential points, without becoming enemies; and your heart is said to be in the right place (*on rend généralement Justice à votre cœur*). Besides, it is childish to take offence at the things people say against one. Imagine, my friend, the number of people who utter all kinds of libels against the mayor of Paris! Imagine how many of them I know to have spread damaging reports about me! Yet it doesn't worry me, I can assure you. If I am not totally indifferent to what others think about me, at least I value my own opinion more highly. No . . . you and I are never likely to take opposite sides: we shall always hold the same political

faith. I need not assure you that it is impossible for me to join in any movement against you: my tastes, my character, my principles all forbid it. I don't believe that you covet my position, any more than I covet the king's. But if, when my term of office comes to an end, the people were to offer you the mayoralty, I suppose that you would accept it; whereas in all good conscience I could never accept the crown. Keep well. March ahead! The times are too serious to think of anything but the public interest'.¹

There is a strain of moral patronage, and an artificial frankness about this letter, which would warn the reader, even without the previous correspondence of April, that the friendship between the two men, whatever their party associations, was breaking down. Robespierre cannot have liked either the tactless allusions to his touchiness, or the hint that he was jealous of Pétion's position, or the suggestion that he would be glad to succeed him in the mayoralty, whilst the other might aspire, however jokingly, to a crown. Did he keep the letter through a lingering regard for its writer, or because of the damaging use that might be made, some day, of that last paragraph? Within a few months, at any rate, the breach between the friends was complete. Not only had they 'taken opposite sides'; but Pétion was printing speeches attacking Robespierre, and Robespierre retorting Pétion's ill-timed charge of jealousy². Within two years Pétion was dead, and Robespierre, soon to follow him, passed (was it without a pang?) a proposal from a zealous commissioner at Bordeaux to raze to the ground the house in which the ex-mayor of Paris, a hunted refugee, had sought to hide himself from the vengeance of the Jacobins.³

III

Within a week of Pétion's letter, France and Paris plunged into the elections which were to decide the government of the country for the next three years. Powerless in

¹Corresp. 152.

²*Lettres à ses commettans*, esp. Nos. 7 and 10.

³Corresp. 302.

face of the Commune and its semi-independent Sections, the Legislative Assembly, by a decree of August 11, had succeeded in enforcing the principle of indirect election, but had conceded that the electoral assemblies should be chosen by primary assemblies consisting of all citizens aged twenty-one, with one year's domicile, and able to support themselves: the distinction between 'active' and 'passive' citizens was at last swept away. The Paris Sections, unable to secure direct election, made it a condition that the electoral assemblies should deliberate and vote in public, and that their choice of deputies should be submitted to the primary assemblies for ratification. The evident object of these provisions, which were first expressed in a manifesto by Robespierre's own Section,¹ was to intimidate the electors, and to secure the nomination of deputies agreeable to the people.

The nomination of electors began on August 26, and went on till September 6—in a few cases till September 8. The *Section de la Place Vendôme* met on the 27th, to elect sixteen representatives, and the operation took four days, the sessions lasting from 4 to 11 p.m., and on one occasion all night. Robespierre presided, and was the first to be elected, with only one dissentient; among the sixteen was his friend Duplay.²

Great trouble had been taken by the Commune to exclude royalist or reactionary candidates. All royalist papers had been suppressed; the names of those who had met at the Sainte-Chapelle a year before to elect deputies to the unpopular Legislative Assembly were printed, as a warning to their successors; and the system of voting was by *appel nominal*, which gave full scope to intimidation. The result, to a patriot mind, was eminently satisfactory. Out of an electoral assembly of 990 persons³ only 195 were old electors; 795 were new men. Brissot, an elector in 1790 and 1791, was passed over; the new electors included Marat as well as Robespierre.

¹August 27; *arrêté municipal*, August 28 (Mellié, 65).

²Robespierre was also nominated by the *Section Halles-aux-Blés*.

³850 representing the Paris Sections, 140 the suburban Cantons.

Then came the second stage of the elections. The first business of the *Assemblée électorale du département de Paris*, when it met in the *Salle de l'Archévêché* on September 2, was to secure a more suitable place for its deliberations, which had to be public, and would be more likely to turn out as desired if conducted under the eyes of patriots. It was therefore agreed to ask the Jacobins for the use of their hall; and Robespierre, who had planned this move,¹ was able to report next day that permission had been granted.²

The next step was to take fresh precautions that the elections should go in the direction desired by the Commune. Robespierre accordingly proposed, in the name of the primary assemblies, that the electoral assembly should exclude from the right of voting any of its own members 'who had taken part in the proceedings of any unpatriotic (*incivique*) club, such as the *club monarchique*, the *club de la Sainte-Chapelle*, the *Feuillants* or their affiliated societies, or any of those who had signed the petition of the 20,000';³ and this arbitrary over-ruling of the choice of the primary electors was carried, apparently without question. Paris was now beginning to see what liberty meant in the minds of libertarians.

It was at this same meeting that a member, whose name is not given, 'reported that charges (not specified) had been brought against M. Robespierre by a *valet-de-chambre* of the *ci-devant* king': upon which proposals were made to warn the people against listening to such calumnies against one whom Marat placed first on his list of the best citizens — *hommes qui ont le mieux mérité de la patrie*,⁴ and Robespierre declared from the tribune 'that he would face with perfect calmness the swords of the enemies of the common weal, and that he would bear with him to the tomb the certainty that France would remain free, and the satisfaction of

¹It is forecast in the manifesto of August 27 (Mellié, 66).

²The Assembly adjourned for the negotiations from 1 to 5 p.m. on the 2nd. The club had refused a similar request by the *Procureur-général-syndic* only the day before; but Robespierre was able to report the success of his mission by 11 p.m. on the 3rd.

³A royalist protest against the events of June 20, 1792 (Mathiez, 193).

⁴Charavay, *Assemblée électorale de Paris*, 3/600.

having served his 'country'. It is difficult not to think that this rather silly scene was staged to forward Robespierre's candidature: for the next day he was proposed by acclamation, and unanimously adopted, as Vice-president of the assembly,¹ and two days later (September 5) he was elected at the head of the list of deputies to the Convention, on the first count, by 338 votes out of 525—a result hailed by a speaker at the Jacobins as a favourable omen for future elections.² The rival candidate on this occasion was Pétion, whose obvious vexation at his defeat was used by Robespierre to retort his recent charge of jealousy: everyone, he said, could see Pétion's face changing colour during the counting of the votes.³

This was paltry enough; but worse was to follow. On September 9 a motion was passed that the claims of individual candidates should be open to discussion; and under this system Marat was elected, after a speech by Robespierre which was widely resented. Louvet accused him of 'domineering over the Assembly by intimidation and intrigue,' of putting forward Marat against the Englishman, Dr. Priestley, whose character he had 'blackened,' and of refusing a hearing to those who wished to speak on the other side. 'I was mobbed', he said, 'by those fellows with sabres and cudgels, Robespierre's bodyguard, who always surrounded the future dictator, wherever he went. They said to me, with threats (and, remember, it was a time when assassinations were taking place) "You shall go the same way as the rest"'. From Louvet's later pamphlet it appears that Robespierre said nothing worse about Priestley than that he 'wrote books in his study,' and nothing better about Marat than that 'in order to combat Lafayette and the court, he hid himself for a year in a cellar':⁴ but, according

¹ Collot d'Herbois was President, and among the Secretaries were Carra, Santerre, and Marat.

² But Robespierre did not get so many votes as some of the definitely republican candidates—Billaud-Varenne, Lavicomterie, Robert, Boucher, or Saint-Sauveur (Aulard, 238).

³ *Lettres à ses commettans*, No. 10.

⁴ Louvet. *A Maximilien Robespierre et ses royalistes*. Mme Roland repeats the charge of attacking Priestley (Champagneux 2/339). Gorsas (*Courrier des 83 départements*, September 10), also complained of his speech.

to the queer code of the time, while there was nothing wrong in rigging the elections in the Jacobin interest, it was highly improper to overpress the claims of a Jacobin candidate. The charge of intrigue was also made, almost inevitably, in the case of Augustin Robespierre, who was elected on September 16; but Maximilien declared that he had stood on his own merits;¹ and it was known that the poet Ronsin, who had written to ask for Robespierre's support, gained nothing by it.² Nevertheless, the accusation of undue influence comes from too many sides to be ignored;³ and it can hardly be doubted that in 1792, as in 1789, Robespierre, in his eagerness to further the popular cause, overstepped the line between what was then regarded as legitimate and illegitimate canvassing.

But indeed, for this, or for any other irregularities, the system was chiefly to blame. How were either calm deliberation or independent voting possible in an election in which the majority used its power, not to outvote the minority, but to disqualify it from voting; in which the passions and controversies of the hustings were introduced into the polling booth; and in which the electors were exasperated by a method of voting that absorbed eighteen days' sessions of six or seven hours each in the selection of twenty-four candidates? Nor can it have been much consolation—though it helps to explain the persistence of the system—that electors were paid for their attendance. For, in spite of this fact, only the comparatively leisured and well-to-do could afford to take an active part in so tedious and troublesome an affair—an additional reason for the tactics employed by the popular leaders to secure the return of their candidates.⁴

IV

There were other and more serious reasons why the elections of September, 1792, could not be conducted

¹Lehon to Robespierre, Aug. 28 (Corresp. 153); *Lettres à ses commettants*, No. 10.

²Corresp. 154.

³e.g. *Aux quarante-huit sections de Paris*, by Méhée fils (Charavay, 3/612).

⁴v. Méry in R.F. 67/101, 68/15; cp. Mellié, 91.

calmly or dispassionately. The days during which they were held coincided with the invasion of France by foreign troops, the massacre of 'royalists' and 'aristocrats' in the Paris prisons, and the mobilization of the national defences. The electors debated in an atmosphere now chilled by fear, and now heated by patriotic excitement; in which every friend became a hero, and every enemy a traitor to the country.

August 10 had been hailed as a victory over the Austrian vanguard in Paris; but on August 15 it was heard that an invading army had crossed the frontier, and invested Thionville. On the 26th news arrived that Longwy had surrendered, under circumstances that strongly suggested treason. Within the next few days it was known that Verdun, the last fortress between the frontier and Paris, was also threatened, that there was danger of royalist risings in Brittany and Dauphinée, and that in the Vendée fighting had actually taken place between patriot troops and royalists resisting recruitment. On September 2 a messenger from the front brought news that Verdun was now besieged, that its commandant had been summoned to surrender, and that he could not hold out for more than two days. This succession of bad news, falling upon a city already distracted by the contest between the Assembly and the Commune, and by the controversies of a General Election, drove the people almost to frenzy, and it soon became doubtful whether there was any authority in the capital capable of preserving order, or preventing outbursts of violence on the part of the Sections, either against property or persons.

On August 11 the Assembly had authorised the municipal authorities to place suspected persons under provisional arrest. On the 15th, in view of the invasion, it had prohibited the families of *émigrés* from leaving their Communes, so that they might be treated as hostages. On the 18th, and again on the 29th, it had ordered fresh arrests, both of priests, and of members of the royal household; and during the last two days of the month commissioners sent out by the Sections searched every house in the city for

arms, and took away some 3,000 suspects to prison. These measures may have been intended less to satisfy the demand for victims, than to save them from popular vengeance; but it was more than doubtful whether their lives were any safer under lock and key.

When the news of the siege of Verdun arrived on September 2, the Commune ordered an alarm-gun to be fired, the drums beat to arms, the city gates were closed, and the Champ de Mars was filled with a crowd of volunteers, unfit to fight, but clamouring to go to the front. About noon there was an enthusiastic scene in the Assembly, when Vergniaud, Thuriot, and Danton, representatives of both political parties, vied in patriotic appeals to arms. Meanwhile certain other feelings, sordid by-products of patriotism, had been gaining ground in the popular mind—fear of treachery, and thirst for revenge; and no one who remembered the threat of an attack upon the prisons three weeks ago¹ could doubt that the danger was far more imminent now. The special tribunal set up a fortnight before to judge the ‘criminals’ of August 10 had ordered only three executions, and had caused special discontent by acquitting Montmorin, the governor of Fontainebleau.² Public funerals of the ‘victims’ of the 10th had worked upon the people’s nerves; and the last and most imposing of these rites, celebrated at the Tuileries on the 26th, had led to public demands for revenge. The Vigilance Committee of the Commune, reconstituted on August 30, and strengthened by the addition of Marat, was known to be sorting out the prisoners, and releasing those guilty of minor offences. Marat himself, as though to underline this policy, had put up posters, advising the volunteers not to leave for the front, until they had visited the prisons, and executed upon their inmates the justice of the people.

It was not surprising that, after all these incitements, some

¹On August 11 the administrator of the *bureau de police* wrote to Santerre, asking for a special guard at the Châtelet, Conciergerie, and La Force, in view of threats to lynch the prisoners (A.R. 14/422).

²True, he was popularly confused with his brother, the ex-Minister for Foreign Affairs.

of the Sections should begin to take matters into their own hands. The *Section Poissonnière* passed a motion calling for the execution of all conspirators in the prisons, as a measure of security before Paris was denuded of troops; the *Section des Arcis* resolved that the people should make sure of (*s'assurer*) the prisons; and the *Luxembourg Section*, more explicitly, that 'the prisons should be cleansed by the shedding of the blood of their inmates, before leaving Paris'. In the excitement and panic of September 2, words were soon followed by acts. In the *Luxembourg* and *Sansculottes* Sections, previously strongholds of clerical landlordism, the revolution of August 10 had led to an outburst of anger against the priests, many of whom were rounded up, and interned in the Carmes (Carmelite convent), or the seminary of Saint-Firmin. Others, arrested by the Vigilance Committee of the Commune, had been temporarily herded together at the Mairie. It was these last who were to furnish the first victims. With a provocativeness which was perhaps designed, it was arranged that they should be transferred on September 2, in carriages, and by daylight, from the Mairie to the prison of the Abbaye Saint-Germain-des-Près. About three o'clock that Sunday afternoon, when four carriages containing twenty priests arrived in front of the Abbaye, they were set upon by a mob, and nearly all murdered. The same evening an informal tribunal was established at the Abbaye under one Maillard,¹ acting on instructions from certain members of the Vigilance Committee, and the inmates of the prison were 'tried': forty-three were acquitted, and 122, including Bachmann, the commandant of the Suisses, and Montmorin, the ex-Minister, condemned to death. As soon as sentence was passed, they were hustled into the street, and cut down by ruffians armed with sabres and pikes. At the Carmes, the same night, all the imprisoned priests were put to death; more than 200 thieves and debtors were murdered at the Châtelet; and a number more, including the queen's

¹He had distinguished himself once before, by leading the women's march to Versailles on October 5, 1789.

friend, the Princess de Lamballe, at La Force. On September 3 fresh massacres took place at Saint-Bernard (of convicts), and Saint-Firmin (of priests); whilst at the Bicêtre reformatory the 160 victims were boys and girls. Finally, on the morning of September 4, 'popular justice' was at last appeased by the murder of 35 female inmates of the Salpêtrière hospital. On September 2 these various institutions had contained 2,637 persons: by the 5th, at least 1,100 of them had been massacred—300 priests, 150 royalists implicated in the affair of August 10, 50 Suisses, and 600 common criminals.¹

Whilst these things were going on, the Assembly and the Commune met as usual; and the electoral assembly was discussing the form of its entry-card, and what sort of crest it should put at the head of its note-paper. Commissioners were, indeed, sent to the Abbaye, and made speeches, but soon came back saying that they could do nothing. Santerre, the commandant of the National Guard, reported that he could not count on his men to interfere with the murderers. Meanwhile the Vigilance Committee tried to improve the occasion by sending a circular to the departmental authorities in the provinces, telling them what was being done in Paris, and urging them to do likewise; and this circular was expedited by Fabre, Danton's secretary at the Ministry of Justice. 'The circular was superfluous,' says Mathiez, and gives instances of priests and aristocrats murdered without such official encouragement at various places up and down the country between August 19 and September 12. But it at least paved the way for such crimes as that of Versailles, where fifty-three prisoners from Orleans were massacred, on their way to Paris, on September 9. On the other hand, Arras was probably not the only place where the emissaries of the Paris Commune were not allowed to publish their manifesto, and were driven out of the town.² As for the people of Paris, they shared in the fear or apathy of their leaders, and it was not until September

¹v. Walter, *Les massacres de Septembre*. Caron (same title), a recent and independent study, gives the total as between 1,090 and 1,395.

²Jacob, *Lebon*, 50.

5-8 that some of the Sections, apprehensive for their own safety, began to pass motions about 'the protection of life and property', and to appeal for a return to sanity. The country people near the capital went on with their work as usual. They were sorry that it was necessary to kill the prisoners; but what else could one do with aristocrats who were plotting to blow up Paris, with all its inhabitants?¹

V

It has been necessary to describe the prison massacres in some detail, in order to state fairly the conditions governing the question, what was the degree of Robespierre's responsibility? The massacres went on for at least forty-eight hours. Those at La Force and the Abbaye had the official approval of the Commune (those at the Carmes and Saint-Firmin, perhaps also at the Bicêtre, were the work of Sectional Committees). The idea that the victims were political criminals, or a danger to the state, could not be held, of more than a minority, by anyone who knew the facts. Robespierre was a member of the General Council (the executive committee) of the Commune, and of the electoral assembly; he was also one of the most knowledgeable and influential men in Paris. So far as is known, he never said a word or raised a finger against the massacres.

In the minutes of the Commune for September 2 it is recorded that, after representatives had been sent to the Abbaye and the Assembly, the king's valet-de-chambre, M. Hue, was questioned at the bar of the House as to why he had whistled the air *O Richard, o mon roi!* and was sent to gaol for the offence; after which 'MM. Billaud-Varenne and Robespierre described in patriotic terms the profound grief that they felt for the present state of France, and denounced a conspiracy for putting the Duke of Brunswick on the throne'. Soon Manuel returned from the Abbaye

¹Malouet's evidence, in Deslandres, 1/157. The evidence for the state of opinion in the provinces, for analogous massacres there, is carefully examined by Caron, *Les massacres de Septembre*, 153 f., 363 f.

with a lamentable account of what was going on there. No action was taken. During the evening session commissioners are twice sent to La Force—the first time to investigate, the second time ‘to calm the excitement as soon as possible’ (*pour hâter de calmer les esprits*). Next morning there is a request from the Quinze-Vingts Section to be allowed to hold the families of *émigrés* as hostages, and to kill conspirators: the Commune passes to the next business, remarking that the Sections may do whatever they think best. Soon afterwards Robespierre is deputed, with Deltroy and Manuel, ‘to go to the Temple (where the king and queen were imprisoned), and to see that everything is quiet there’.¹ Robespierre, then, was at the Commune on both the crucial days; he was well aware of what was going on; he agreed with other leaders of the people (what other inference can be drawn from his silence?) that it was better to let matters take their course;² his interference with the massacres limited itself, like theirs, to some half-hearted attempts to calm the minds of the murderers. In this he did no better, and no worse, than Danton, Roland, Santerre, and others whose official responsibility was greater than his own.³ But when he is found, two months later, defending his conduct on the double ground that he did not know what was happening, and that he could not go against the trend of public opinion,⁴ one is bound to say, that the first excuse is untrue, and the second unworthy of a statesman.

Nor is that the whole count. In his speech at the Commune on September 4, delivered some hours after the massacre had begun, and subsequent to the announcement of this to the body of which he was a member,⁵ Robespierre

¹*Procès-verbaux de la Commune de Paris*, in *Mémoires sur les journées de Septembre*, 1792 (ed. Baudouin, Vol. 11).

²Rétif de la Bretonne, who gives an eye-witness's account of the massacre, assumes that Robespierre agreed with Danton and the Commune as to the advisability of ‘emptying the prisons’. (*Nuits révolutionnaires*, 22.)

³For the well-known story of Danton's admission of his responsibility to Louis Philippe, v. A.R. 10/677.

⁴Speech of Nov. 5.

⁵v. *Procès-verbaux de la Commune de Paris*, (ed. Baudouin) 11/242. Ward (189) tries to show that he may not have heard of the massacre.

went out of his way to denounce Brissot, if not by name, at least in unmistakable terms, as a conspirator, and as an agent of the Duke of Brunswick; upon which the Vigilance Committee issued warrants for the arrest of Roland, Brissot, and other prominent Girondins. This could only mean one thing. Had not Danton, moved by the threat against a fellow-Minister, secured the withdrawal of the warrant,¹ the Girondist leaders would almost certainly have perished with the other prisoners. In short, a charge lies against Robespierre not merely of doing nothing to stop the massacres, not merely of condoning them as an execution of popular justice upon criminals who had escaped the law, but of trying to use them as a cloak for political assassination. Mme Roland had no doubt as to his guilt. 'Robespierre and Marat', she wrote to Bancal des Issarts on September 5, 'are holding a sword over our heads. They are doing all they can to stir up the people, and to egg it on against the National Assembly and the Council (of Ministers). They have set up a *chambre ardente*. They dispose of a small army, paid for either by money they have found at the Tuileries, or by funds provided by Danton, who is the hidden leader of the gang'. Again, on September 9, after mentioning Robespierre's election to the Convention, and the attack on Brissot, 'It is my friend Dton. who manages the whole affair: Robp. is only his puppet (*mannequin*), Mat. only carries his dagger and torch. This brutal demagogue is our real ruler; we are no better than his slaves, whilst we expect every day to become his victims'. And again, on the 11th, 'The electoral body is getting worse and worse, and Robp. is dropping the mask²'.

Mme Roland is, of course, a prejudiced witness; but her charge gains significance from the coincidence of the massacres with the elections. Both began on the same day, September 2. Robespierre was elected on the 5th, Danton

¹This rests on a statement by Prudhomme, uncontradicted at the time, and corroborated by Mme Roland (Madelin, *Danton*, 169; Barthou, *Danton*, 110).

²Corresp. ed. Perroud, 2/434, 436. Her friend Buzot also speaks of Robespierre and Danton as responsible for the massacres. (Walter, *Marat*, 249.)

on the 6th, Marat on the 9th, the day of the massacre at Versailles. When the polls closed on the 19th, Paris was found to be represented exclusively by the candidates of the Commune, which had at worst organized, and at best allowed, the massacres. The temptation, and the opportunity, to get the leaders of the *Brissotin* party out of the way during this crisis must have presented themselves. It would be so easy to order their provisional arrest, and to disclaim responsibility for anything more serious that might follow.

This then, is the question. Behind the ruffians who murdered the prisoners at the Abbaye was the Vigilance Committee of the Commune: behind the Vigilance Committee—was there a secret understanding between Danton in the Assembly, Marat at the Commune, and Robespierre in the Election chamber? Were they agreed in condoning the massacres? Did Danton refuse to allow the proscription of Roland and Brissot, proposed by Marat and Robespierre? Can we find some other interpretation of the speech of September 2, for the police visit paid to Brissot's house, and for the story of Danton's intervention? Or must we accept the verdict of a recent investigator, that Robespierre's denunciation of Brissot was 'an act of cold and calculated cruelty, which can only be regarded as an attempt to get rid of a dangerous and embarrassing rival?'¹ Have we to deal merely with a moral cowardice that dare not interfere, or with a moral turpitude that gives the excited crowd an easy opportunity to lynch one's political enemy? Is Robespierre excusable on the plea, 'I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it'; or was his offence a less subtle, but not less detestable variant of that of David against Uriah the Hittite? It is an unpleasant choice of precedents; and it is hardly possible for any one who has admired Robespierre's courage in opposition and adversity

¹Walter, *Les massacres de Septembre*, 160. cp. Prudhomme's story (4/123, given on the authority of Mandat, an eye-witness) of a meeting at the Ministry of Justice on September 3, when Robespierre objected to the proposal of a dictatorship, that 'Brissot would be the dictator'. 'It is not a dictatorship, then, that you object to, but Brissot?' 'Both!'

to feel happy about his conduct when the turn of events puts his enemies into his power.¹

VI

On September 21 the Legislative Assembly closed the session which, to save constitutional appearances, was regarded as having been permanent since August 10, by giving a formal welcome to the National Convention, and by escorting its members in procession from the Tuileries to the Manège. The deputies at this time numbered some 750; ultimately there were as many as 903, of whom 618 were new men, who had not sat in either of the previous Assemblies. The significance of this was that the old controversies would be fought out before a new audience. The small but concentrated Jacobin party, or 'Mountain' (*Montagne*) as it was called,² under the leadership of the Paris *bloc*, found itself 'in Opposition' against the larger but less homogeneous 'Government' group of the Girondins, the representatives of the provincial point of view, who had been elected, for the most part, before the events of September were known in the country constituencies, and who put forward a less definite political programme;³ whilst behind both was a mass of members, of uncertain and varying size, to whom the recent developments of party strife meant little, and who were concerned for the essential issues—the organization of republican government, and the conduct of the war. These men were critics of both parties, impatient of their quarrels, subservient to any group or policy that showed itself able to 'save the country', but capable of reasserting their independence,

¹Robespierre always had apologists. Souberbeille, interviewed by Louis Blanc in extreme old age, said that he could never speak about the events of September without horror, and had once exclaimed in the doctor's hearing, apropos of some barbarity by the Jacobin Ronsin, 'Blood again! nothing but blood! They will end by drowning the Revolution in it, these miscreants!' (Blanc, 7/192). For Robespierre's own defence, v. 1/289.

²From the high seats it occupied at the end of the Hall, but not without thought of the Dispensation of Mount Sinai. (R.F. 45/544, 46/171.)

³Aulard, *Études*, 1/6.

and overthrowing those whom they put and kept in power.¹

This Convention was the Sovereign People, assembled, as in 1789, to make a Constitution. There was an end, therefore, of the six weeks' dictatorship of the Commune; moreover, although the Jacobins controlled the new General Council elected in December, and the Departmental Directory re-established in January, yet they had to reckon with the independence of the forty-eight Sections, each of which regarded itself as an autonomous portion of the Sovereign People. There was an end, too, of another great source of public anxiety; for on the very day that the Convention met, news came of the victory of Valmy, and (a week later) of the retreat of the Prussian army.

It might have been thought that, with the king a prisoner, the foreign foe and attendant *émigrés* in flight, and the country waiting for its first National Government, the political factions would forego their quarrels. Far from it. A king in the Temple was to prove a greater embarrassment, if not a greater danger, than a king at the Tuileries. The Prussian retreat threw into higher relief the dangers and scandal of civil war in the Vendée. Before August 10 the issue had been, Should there be a Republic? Now the issue was, Who shall control it? A contest of opinions became a contest of interests. Before September 20 there had been parties for and against the war. Now that the war seemed to be approaching a successful end, everyone was anxious to manage it, and thought he knew how: the contest of interests became a contest of programmes. But, above all, the events of the last six weeks had made political peace almost impossible. On the one hand, the bloodshed of August 10 left behind it a feeling of hatred, and a demand for vengeance, which had not been satisfied even by the prison massacres, and which now extended beyond the king and the 'aristocrats' to politicians of the Feuillant type, who were suspected of having tried to keep Louis on

¹For a detailed description of the House at this period, v. Dulaure, *Physionomie de la Convention Nationale* (Dauban, *Paris en 1793*, 1); and for the improved facilities given to the Press, R.F. 54/288.

the throne, and were known to favour (under the guise of republicanism) a middle-class and reactionary regime. On the other hand, the brief rule of the Insurrectional Commune seemed to the bourgeois constitutionalists, who still controlled the administration, and represented the main body of opinion in the country, to realize the worst fears expressed in July, 1791; for here were the Paris Sections, enfranchising the lowest type of the city crowd, displacing their official representatives, playing fast and loose with the municipal funds, the municipal troops, and the municipal regulations, filling the prisons by arbitrary arrest of citizens, and emptying them again by organized massacre, intimidating the deputies into passing decrees of a dangerously democratic type, and conducting the elections in such a way that Paris was represented in the Convention by a solid block of nominees of the Commune.

Thus, whilst the Jacobins, conscious of their minority in the country, organized the power of Paris to keep the Revolution moving in a democratic direction, the Girondins prepared to use their majority to crush the dictatorship of the capital. The opportunities of peace were thrown away. Not merely because the politicians would not look to the future, and forget the past, but also because the Revolution had raised fresh issues that could not be foreclosed, France was plunged into a domestic struggle which could only lead to the destruction of one party in the state, and the dictatorship of the other.

VII

As soon as the elections were over, Robespierre began to re-issue his journal, which had appeared very irregularly during the weeks preceding August 10, and had since ceased altogether. Like the Jacobin club, he chose a new title—*Lettres de Maximilien Robespierre, membre de la Convention nationale de France, à ses commettans*. Otherwise the form of the paper was unchanged, though its cover was no longer a challenging red, but a sober grey—perhaps symbolizing the scepticism with which he had by now

come to regard all merely political and constitutional programmes. In the Introduction to his first number Robespierre explained that he would use this tribune, 'open, unlike that of the Convention, to all the world', to defend 'immutable maxims, principles that lie at the base of the social order, as universally recognized as they are universally violated', and to do so in a spirit of truth and reason, opposed to that of passion and party indulged in by other journals. He then went on to outline the work before the Convention, which he visualized as a supplement to that of the Constituent Assembly. 'To perfect the organization and distribution of some of the constituted authorities, on principles already laid down, to dilute (*temperer*) representative aristocracy with a few new institutions calculated to guard it from corruption, and to guarantee the rights of the Sovereign—such, perhaps, is all that the Convention can do, or expect to have to its credit'. What Robespierre contemplates here is a republican revision of the Constitution of 1791, keeping everything of value, from the democratic standpoint, in the old system, whilst debarring the Convention from radical changes, which, in view of the unexpectedly Girondist colour of the new Assembly, could hardly be favourable to popular interests. Nevertheless he must have felt that this was a rather meagre programme for a Messianic assembly, heralded by a national insurrection. He is therefore at pains to point out that political institutions, however democratic they may be, can never be entirely satisfying, and that true republicanism is that of the heart. 'Which of us', he asks, 'would care to descend from the height of the eternal principles we have proclaimed to the actual government of the republic of Berne, Venice, or Holland? . . . It is not enough, therefore, to have overturned the throne: our concern is to erect upon its remains holy equality, and the imprescriptible Rights of Man. It is not the empty name, but the character of the citizens, that constitutes a republic. The soul of a republic is *vertu*—that is, the love of one's country, and a high-minded devotion which sinks all private interests in the

interest of the whole community'. It follows from this, again, that the old political tests are no longer valid. It used to be enough to divide the nation into royalists and patriots. Now that all are nominally republicans and patriots, the division lies between those who put their republicanism to base and selfish uses, and those who endeavour to achieve, through it, the happiness and *vertu* of the whole people. But how is this super-political ideal to be achieved? History, Robespierre thinks, shows that society has always been in greater danger from too much than from too little government: tyranny has been the danger, not anarchy. The great problem before the legislator is to provide enough power for effective government, without the possibility of its abuse. A constitution which secured this result would be 'the masterpiece of the human mind'. It would almost need gods, as Rousseau said, to give such laws to men. And even they might fail; for there must be something in the citizens themselves to which the legislator can appeal—something which only good laws can give them. Are we, then, fixed in a fatal circle? It would seem so. But Robespierre, again following Rousseau, sees a way out of the *impasse*, by way of the natural goodness of the people. He admits, in a passage of unusual charity and common sense, that French history and social habits have made it particularly difficult for the *bourgeoisie* to recognize the merits of the working class. But he believes that 'the first thing a legislator must recognize is that the people is good; the first thing he must feel is the need to avenge the people's wrongs, and to restore its self-respect'. There is, then, after all, a great work for the Convention to attempt. 'The temple of liberty was built the first time by hands still wearing the shackles of despotism. It must be rebuilt . . . upon the foundations of justice and equality'. And this can be done, 'if the Convention never loses sight of the fundamental truth, that its first care must be to safeguard the rights of the citizens, and the sovereignty of the people, against the very government which it is setting up'.

The conclusion is rather bleak, suggesting a constitution in the style of Sieyès, to check rather than to confer the power of government; indeed, Robespierre had little to hope from a Girondist revision of Feuillant legislation. But the interest of the article lies elsewhere—in the sense it shows of the inner meaning of the August revolution, and the vision it expresses of a regenerated democracy, of a state springing from the will of an enlightened and self-respecting people. This was a real contribution to the literature of political science, on the lines of nineteenth-century Liberalism.

VIII

Robespierre's distrust of the Girondins was soon justified. In the preliminary proceedings of September 20, Pétion, now an open enemy, was chosen first President of the Convention, and the Secretariate did not contain a single Jacobin. When the formal sessions began, no time was lost in attacking the Jacobin party;¹ and on September 25 a charge of aiming at dictatorship brought Robespierre to the tribune.² It was a year since he had last addressed a national assembly, and five weeks since he had made any public utterance, outside the electoral meetings and the Commune. There must have been many among his new audience who were eager to hear him speak, and to form their own opinion of his person and policy.

He opened his speech by saying that he welcomed the opportunity to defend, not himself, but his country. Yet almost at once he began to talk about himself, recalling his record in the Constituent Assembly, and describing himself as the most persecuted of all champions of the people. When he reached the 'Self-denying Ordinance' of 1791, the refrain 'I did this, and I did that' (*c'est moi qui . . . c'est moi*

¹Brissot on September 22 and 23, Kersaint, Vergniaud, Lanjuinais, and Buzot on the 24th, Lasource and Rebecqui on the 25th.

²It was made by Rebecqui. Barbaroux defined the charge by saying that 'one day, soon after August 10, Panis designated Robespierre by name as the virtuous man who was likely to become dictator of France'. Panis denied that he had said anything of the kind (Jaurès, 6/185).

qui) led to impatient cries of 'Cut it out!' (*abrégez*). When he was able once more to gain a hearing, he went on to charge his opponents with *fédéralisme*, that is, with 'the intention of turning the French Republic into a congeries of federal republics, which would always be at the mercy of civil disorder, or foreign attack'. 'Let us declare', he ends, 'that the French Republic is a single state (*état unique*) under a single system of constitutional laws. Only the certainty of the strongest possible union between all parts of France can enable us to repulse our enemies with energy and success'.

The interest of this speech is that it announces so clearly the two main themes of the contest between the Mountain and the Gironde. The burden of the charge against the one was to be Dictatorship, and against the other Federalism. To the Girondin—the representative of private property, of middle-class domination, and of the interests of the provinces—dictatorship meant the intimidation of a national assembly by the clubs, the Sections, and the press of the capital; the manœuvres by which Paris had secured a Jacobin representation; and the six weeks' regime of the Insurrectional Commune, with its threats of a socialistic programme. To the Montagnard—the representative of Paris, the champion of the dispossessed and disfranchised classes, and of the parts of the country most endangered by foreign invasion—Federalism meant a denial of what Paris had done for the Revolution, the sacrifice of the political and economic rights of the people to the interests of the business man and the investor, and the break-up of that national unity without which the war could not be carried on. At present both these charges were premature, and rested on the flimsiest sort of evidence. They were, none the less, logical inferences from the two main tendencies of the situation; for history hinted that France, under the strain of war, would either concentrate its power in an autocracy, or dissipate it in civil strife; and, before the

¹The phrase was just 3 days old; it had not been used in the decree abolishing royalty (September 21), but was inserted rather tentatively the following day. (R.F. 22/97.) Already it was controversial.

year was out, both charges were to find their justification—the first in the Committee of Public Safety, and the second at Lyon and Toulon.

At the moment, whilst Federalism was a remote danger, Dictatorship, as Robespierre himself had been foremost in urging, was an ever-present possibility, and the most damaging suspicion that could be attached to a political enemy. It was, in fact, so dangerous, that its effect was, as the Girondists might have foreseen, to unite their opponents. 'It is my duty in justice', said Marat, 'to declare that my colleagues, and particularly Robespierre and Danton, have consistently disapproved of the idea of either a triumvirate or a dictatorship. If any one is guilty of having disseminated these ideas among the public, it is I; for I believe I am the first political writer, perhaps the only one in France since the Revolution began, to propose a military tribune, a dictator, or a triumvirate as the sole means of crushing traitors and conspirators'; and he went on to reiterate his belief in the need of 'a wise strong man' to punish the guilty, and to save the country. Danton was less bold; but his demand for the death penalty against anyone who proposed either a dictatorship or the dismemberment of the country cleverly countered the attack; and the debate ended with the passing of a decree, not against dictatorship, but against federalism—'The French Republic', it was declared, 'is one and indivisible'.

IX

On October 5 Robespierre spoke at the Jacobins for the first time, so far as the records show, since August 17. Now that a new Assembly was in session, and the club was no longer overshadowed by the Commune, or distracted by the rival activities of the ambiguous *Club de la Réunion*,¹ the hall in the rue Saint-Honoré once more took its place as the lobby of the Manège, where deputies discussed, before and after the debates, the *acta* and *agenda* of the Convention.

¹v. Mathiez in R.H. 148/63.

But the constitution and temper of the club were changing. It had altered its name, since September 21, to *Société des Jacobins, amis de l'égalité et de la liberté*; and it was no longer dedicated to constitutionalism. Along with this homage to Robespierriest principles, it was becoming, more and more, a party meeting-place, the headquarters of the Mountain, a society whose members must not only pay a subscription, but also acknowledge certain leaders, and conform to certain tests of political orthodoxy. Thus, on October 5, Robespierre discouraged the attendance of deputies from the provinces—Parisians were easier company; on the 12th Brissot's name was struck off the list of members; on the 15th—the day after Robespierre and Dumouriez, fresh from his victories, had embraced, amidst the applause of the members—the society issued a circular giving a Jacobin version of the August revolution, and denouncing the Girondist attacks on Robespierre; on the 28th Maximilien delivered an address on the part played by calumny in the Revolution, with special reference to d'André and Maury;¹ and on the 29th, as a sequel to Louvet's attacks on Robespierre, his name too was struck off the club. Soon the line of *démonciation* and *radiation* begins to stretch ominously ahead; and a contemporary caricaturist is encouraged to represent Robespierre, in a chef's costume, with a *bonnet rouge* on his head and a pestle in his hand, boiling his enemies in a cooking-pot—*marmite épuratoire des Jacobins*.²

Meanwhile the Girondins were not inactive. They proposed to counter the hostility of the Sections by filling Paris with volunteers from the provinces; and from October 19 onwards these new *fédérés* began to arrive in such numbers that by the middle of November they numbered nearly 16,000 men. Some of them mounted guard over the Convention: others marched through the streets, singing a ditty whose refrain asked for 'Marat's head, and Robespierre's, and Danton's', and were followed by a mob to the Palais Royal, shouting 'Death to Marat and Robespierre!'³

¹This was published in No. 3 of the *Lettres à ses commettans* (November 2), as *Sur l'influence de la calomnie sur la Révolution*.

²A.R. 1/235.

³B. and R. 20/184.

The danger of bloodshed, no less real than in July, 1791, or August, 1792, was averted partly by Marat's tact—he visited the barracks of the *fédérés* from Marseille, and asked some of them to dinner; partly by Robespierre's exhortations to calmness,¹ and by the steps taken by Pache, as Minister of War, to send the volunteers to the front. Ultimately those who remained in Paris came under Jacobin influence, and remained to strengthen the forces at the disposal of the Mountain. The failure of this Girondist move is well illustrated by a series of letters that Robespierre received from one Aigoin of Montpellier: in June, 1792, he writes as a champion of Brissot and Lafayette; by November he is denouncing the *fédérés*, and proposing the publication of daily papers to counteract Girondist propaganda.²

This affair was not the only failure of the Girondist majority in the Convention to gain control of Paris. Attempts were made to capture the personnel of the municipality. Here the difficulty was to find candidates for posts which, however well paid, were decidedly dangerous. The mayoralty, which should have been filled in October, was declined in turn by Pétion and d'Ormesson, and not accepted until the end of November by the insignificant Chambon. Later elections went altogether against the Girondins. The municipal officials chosen in December included Chaumette, ex-President of the Insurrectional Commune, and Hébert, editor of the extremist *Père Duchesne*. The new Commune was as revolutionary as the old. Robespierre himself was nominated for the mayoralty, and might perhaps have had it. The post carried a stipend of 75,000 livrès; but he refused to give up his work as a deputy for any other position, however important or well-paid.

X

Exasperated by these failures, the Girondist leaders launched a frontal attack against Robespierre. J. B. Louvet,

¹Speeches of October 15 and 29.

²Corresp. 136, 148, 149.

a novelist and romanticist, who lived in a world where everything was unreal except his own tinsel passions, had been waved on to the political stage by the magic of Mme Roland. He was at present editor of *La Sentinelle*, an anti-Jacobin publication in poster form, financed by Roland out of police grants made from Danton's secret service fund;¹ and he was willing enough to show his gratitude to his patrons, as well as to indulge his taste for publicity, by baiting the chief enemy of his party.

On October 29 Robespierre was in the tribune of the Convention, attempting to answer attacks based upon an anonymous letter,² and upon suggestions of another September 2, aimed at the Girondist leaders. His old enemy Guadet was in the chair, using his position to harass the speaker; interruptions made it difficult for him to get a hearing. When at last he made some general observations on the scandal of personal intrigues and attacks in the House, Louvet suddenly intervened. 'I demand a hearing', he cried, 'to accuse Robespierre'. 'And so do we', added Rebecqui and Barbaroux. Merlin de Thionville protested that it was no time for private quarrels. Robespierre's remedy against personal attacks, Danton suggested, lay in the courts. 'If I take your advice', retorted Robespierre, 'will the Convention pay the costs of the trial?'

'If every member of the House were so touchy' . . . began Buzot, but Robespierre interrupted him, and made a rush for the tribune. At this, Rebecqui protested against his 'trying to intimidate this House by speeches, as he has succeeded in intimidating the Jacobins', and Guadet called him to order. At the end of Buzot's speech the closure was carried, and the President overruled Robespierre's claim to reply.³

Such was the prelude to Louvet's denunciation—the first stage of a parliamentary *corrida*, in which the victim had been goaded into exasperation by a crowd of political

¹Perrond in R.F. 62/105. Fourcade alleged that Roland offered him 300 *livres* a month to write for this paper (A.R. 15/55).

²The text is in Jaurès, 6/220.

³There is a vivid description of this scene in Moore's *Journal*.

picadors. Now the *toreador* steps into the arena, armed with a broadsword rather than a rapier, but ready to kill.

Louvet's speech covered the whole history of the Revolution since August 10, and charged Robespierre, at every turn of events, with being the villain of the piece, arch-intriguer against the heroic Gironde. August 10, he declared, was *their* work: the Commune, inspired by Robespierre, and afterwards set itself to *sabotage* their national policy. Robespierre's party was responsible for the prison massacres, and for the exclusion of Girondist voters from the polls. Robespierre had put himself forward as the leader of the Commune, bringing false charges against Brissot and his friends, and manifestly aiming at a dictatorship. 'The authority of the Assembly', said Louvet, 'was insulted and set aside by an insolent demagogue, who came to the bar of the House to dictate its decrees, went back to the General Council to denounce its acts, and returned again to the Commission of Twenty-one to threaten it with a call to arms'. This version of Robespierre's conduct on August 12 caused such an uproar in the House that he could get no hearing for a reply. But at the end of Louvet's speech his credit was still so far undamaged that he was given a week in which to prepare a considered answer to the charges brought against him.

It was enough. The *Réponse de Maximilien Robespierre à l'accusation de J.B. Louvet*, delivered in the House on November 5, and printed both by the Convention and the Jacobins, completely demolished his enemy. It took Louvet's charges one by one, and showed how ridiculous they were. He was accused, said Robespierre, of aiming at a dictatorship: yet none but a madman could suppose that his credit in Paris, without backing of money or arms, could master the other eighty-two departments. He was accused of being a friend of Marat—Marat, with whom he had once conversed, and disagreed. He was accused of tyrannizing over the elections, when he had done no more than others did, or than the regulations allowed. He had imposed his opinions, it was said, upon the Jacobin club, especially during the

last ten months: this was an attack upon the club itself, which, during that period, had expressed the true opinions of the people, and had saved the country from disaster. As to the August revolution, he cannot, indeed, claim a leading part in that victory, since he was only nominated to the Commune on the 10th; but it was the work of the Commune, not of any political party. The Commune had been guilty of illegalities? Perhaps; but what of it, at such a crisis? 'The Revolution is illegal: the fall of the Bastille and of the throne were illegal—as illegal as liberty itself!' Besides, whatever the Sections and *fédérés* did on August 10 was done in the name of the whole people; and if the end does not justify the means, at least the whole justifies the part. We are here very near the pitfalls of *droit administratif*; but Robespierre hurries on to the most serious charge against himself—that he was implicated in the prison massacres. His defence is, first, that he spent so much time, during those days, either at home, or at the electoral assembly and the Jacobins, that he knew no more of what was going on in the prisons than anyone else did, and indeed heard it less soon; secondly, that the General Council, of which he was a member, but which he had ceased to attend,¹ tried to stop the massacres, but failed; and that, thirdly, in view of the indignation caused by the loss of life on August 10, the excitement due to the approach of the enemy, and the desire of the people—for it was not a mere handful of assassins—to execute vengeance on the prisoners, no one could have prevented the massacres.

Robespierre himself must have distrusted the effect of such special pleading; for he went on as soon as possible to a rhetorical appeal which effectually distracted his hearers from the weakness of his case. 'It seems pretty certain', he said, 'that one innocent man perished; and doubtless even one is far too many.'² One ought to weep, and we have wept, over this cruel mistake. You should weep even for the criminal victims, who fell beneath the blade of popular justice.

¹This is a fresh untruth; v. the minutes of the Commune, 1/273.

²For the actual number and character of the victims, v. 1/272.

But let your grief, like everything mortal, have an end; and let us keep a few tears for tragedies that affect us more closely—the hundred thousand victims of Bourbon tyranny. ‘When you listen to Louvet’s pathetic account of the death of a Montmorin or a Lamballe, you might imagine you are reading a manifesto by Brunswick or Condé’; and he goes on to denounce the ‘everlasting slanderers’ who wish to ‘avenge despotism, insult the cradle of the Republic, and dishonour the Revolution in the eyes of Europe’. Robespierre, then, makes no apology for the massacres; rather, he takes a kind of pride in them, as the work of the people. Somehow he has persuaded himself, in spite of evidence which must by this time have been known to all, that only one of the 1,300 victims was undeservedly executed. Yet this is nothing to the moral blindness which, knowing the horrible circumstances of the death of the Princess de Lamballe, can speak of it so slightly, or can seriously suppose that it needed Louvet’s exaggerations to make the massacres a dishonour to the Revolution. All that can be said is that this blindness was not peculiar to Robespierre, and that it sprang, not from natural cruelty or insensibility, but from a fanatical belief in the justice of the people, and the rightness of the Revolution.

Robespierre ended his defence by dealing with the events of August 12, and with the anonymous letter which had opened the attack on October 29. His peroration was a renunciation of his right to make counter-accusations against his enemies, and a prayer to the effect that their ‘miserable manœuvres’ might be ‘buried in eternal oblivion’:—for a revolution which had not been dishonoured by the massacre of 1,300 defenceless prisoners might yet be disgraced by the continuance of personal attacks upon Robespierre.

Louvet, trying to reply to this speech, was refused a hearing. Barbaroux was not allowed to speak from the bar of the House. At last Barère, with his flair for expressing the sense of an assembly, moved ‘that the National Convention, considering that it ought to continue its attention

to the interests of the Republic, passes to the business of the day'. Robespierre naturally resented the suggestion that his grievances did not concern the state; but when those words had been dropped, the motion was accepted as a proper comment on an episode which has more interest for a biographer than for a historian.¹

When Maximilien entered the club that evening he was greeted with applause.² Manuel made a speech in which he described Robespierre and Pétion as 'the generals of liberty'; and Collot d'Herbois, carried away by astronomical metaphor, spoke of the one as the 'summer star', and the other the 'winter star' of the political firmament³. He then went on to underline the passages in Robespierre's defence dealing with the prison massacres, in such a way as to put their meaning beyond doubt. September 2, he said, 'is the principal article of our creed of liberty'; and he appealed to Manuel, who, as a member of the Vigilance Committee, had 'co-operated' in it, to agree that it was 'a magnificent day's work' (*une grande journée*). 'Where', he asked, 'would liberty be, where would the Convention be, but for September 2?' (*Loud applause.*)

So much for an unpleasant episode in Robespierre's career.

¹No doubt a good many members shared Garat's opinion (*Mem.* 69), that the quarrel was like that of the Molinists and Jansenists, 'whose whole dispute turned on the manner in which divine grace acts upon the human soul, but who accused one another of disbelieving in the existence of God'.

²This is the first session of the Jacobins reported in the *Moniteur*.

³Their political association outlasted their friendship. It was said (by Chabot at the Jacobins on November 7) that Mme Pétion had applauded Louvet's speech.

CHAPTER X

THE REGICIDE (SEPTEMBER, 1792-JANUARY, 1793)

I

WHEN Robespierre returned to Paris in November, 1791, he left his brother and sister living together in the rue des Rapporteurs at Arras, none too comfortably, upon such allowances as he could afford them, and Augustin's stipend as a member of the Departmental Administrative Council. This post once achieved, Augustin's fortunes improved: he became President of the local Jacobin club, and a judge of the Correctional Tribunal: only his youth (he was twenty-seven) prevented his nomination as a Justice of the Peace. August, 1792, found him Procureur-Syndic of the Arras Commune, and one of the Paris deputies to the Convention.

Within a few days of his election, he set out with his sister for the capital, where they took two rooms in the Duplays' house, one of which had previously been occupied by the deputy Couthon.¹ Charlotte's arrival soon caused trouble in the Duplay household. Accustomed to keep house for her brothers, and jealous of Maximilien's dependence on Mme Duplay, she set herself to persuade him that, as an important politician, he ought to have an establishment of his own, and at last badgered him into taking rooms in the neighbouring rue Saint-Florentin, where she could keep house for him.² But Mme Duplay was not so easily outmanœuvred. Robespierre fell ill, and Charlotte nursed

¹Couthon wrote to Roland from the Duplays' address on October 4, saying he was under notice to leave his present quarters within a week, and asking for rooms in the Tuileries, whence (as a cripple) he could more conveniently attend the Manège. Roland refusing (October 8), on the ground that the Tuileries was being prepared for the Assembly (which moved there on May 10), Couthon found lodgings in the Cour du Manège. But it must be added that the *Almanach royal* for 1792 gives Couthon's address as 343, not 366 rue St. Honoré. (R.F. 57/412.) The two Robespierres paid Duplay 1000 *livres* a year as from October 1, 1793, for a furnished room at the back of the house and an unfurnished room at the front (A.R. 1/345).

²Charlotte does not mention Augustin: did he stay at the Duplays?

him, but said nothing. When Mme Duplay heard of it, she went to see him; and made such a fuss that he gave way again, and returned to the rue Saint-Honoré. 'They are so fond of me', he said, 'and show me so much attention and kindness, that it would be ungrateful of me to refuse'. Charlotte still made attempts to assert her rights; but the other woman was determined to win. One day Charlotte's servant brought Maximilien a present of some pots of jam—it was a weakness of his; Mme Duplay sent them back with the message, 'I'm not going to have her poisoning him'. This *affreux blasphème* was the end. Robespierre remained at the Duplays, and Charlotte consoled herself by describing them to her friends as 'a race of vipers', who used Maximilien's name to get the best of everything at the baker's and the grocer's, whilst ordinary people went without. By July, 1793, the position had grown so strained that Augustin took his sister away with him on a mission to the army of Italy. Ultimately, in May, 1794, the brothers arranged to have her taken back to Arras.¹

The domestic troubles of the great have always afforded material to the moralist and the cynic. The biographer, having no better evidence (it is true) to go upon than the counter-accusations of two jealous women, may well be surprised at the meekness with which Robespierre allowed himself to be overruled, now by his sister, and now by his friend. Probably illness and overwork were the cause, together with a strong sense of family duty, if not of family affection. But it can hardly be doubted that the open hospitality of the rue Saint-Honoré was more in keeping with his reputation, and more useful to his political career, than the privacy of a family party.

II

The illness which led to Robespierre's return to the rue Saint-Honoré was probably the cause of his absence from the Convention between November 5 and November 30;

¹v. 2/105.

and it may not be fanciful to connect this period of enforced leisure with an incident which marked his return to active life. He may well have employed his time in re-reading Rousseau and Helvétius, and in thinking out his political position. At any rate, upon his first reappearance at the club, he arranged (we may safely assume) that his friend Duplay should demand the removal of the bust of Mirabeau, which had for so many months presided over their debates, and that he should make the proposal the opportunity for a speech. The moment was well chosen; for the discovery of the 'iron safe' at the Tuileries on November 20 had revealed Mirabeau's correspondence with the king; and on this same day (December 5) the Assembly had thrown a veil over the great man's bust in the *Manège*, and had appointed a committee to report on his conduct, with a view to the possible extrusion of his body from the *Panthéon*. But many must have wondered how Robespierre would treat the memory of a man whom he had once admired. He soon showed that past associations had no value for him. Mirabeau, he roundly declared, was an 'intriguer', and a 'political charlatan', unworthy of an honour which should be reserved for 'true friends of the people'. 'I see only two men here', he went on, surveying the line of busts, 'who are worthy of our homage—Brutus and J. J. Rousseau. Mirabeau ought to come down, and so ought Helvétius; for he persecuted Jean-Jacques, and would by now have been a counter-revolutionary. I also propose', he went on, 'that all these civic crowns, bestowed for the most part upon living men, should be destroyed. We have learnt only too well, by practical experience, to be less prodigal of our tributes to living men'. These suggestions were greeted with applause both in the House and in the galleries. The crowns were torn down from the walls, and burnt to ashes. Zealous iconoclasts climbed up ladders, pulled down the busts of Mirabeau and Helvétius, and vied with one another in trampling them to fragments on the floor of the House.

This public repudiation of Mirabeau was not allowed

to pass unnoticed. Prudhomme reminded his readers that it was upon Robespierre's own proposal that Mirabeau's body had been deposited in the Panthéon, and challenged him to show that he was any less dishonest than Pétion or Manuel.¹ Robespierre at once penned a long apologia. It was the Paris Directory, he alleged, which had proposed the *panthéonisation*. He disapproved of it, as he did of Mirabeau himself; but he supported it, because it was demanded by public opinion. He expressed at the time the regret that his attitude might be misunderstood. He now admits that he was to blame, but hopes that his fault, such as it was, may be expiated by his political career as a whole, and by the persecutions he has endured in the name of freedom.

This is all very well; perhaps other statesmen, in a similar difficulty, would have made no better defence. But a comparison of the two passages—and it may be assumed that Robespierre had the speech of April 3 in front of him—suggests certain reflexions. First, the original proposal for Mirabeau's *panthéonisation* came, as he says, from the Directory, and its final drafting was due to Barnave; but the support given to it by Robespierre, as the spokesman of the Left, contributed not a little to its acceptance. Secondly, it was not necessary for Robespierre to speak at all on the motion: there were many members who did not, including, no doubt, others who acquiesced in the proposal only out of consideration for public feeling: if he really 'had always thought poorly of Mirabeau', it was needlessly misleading to praise him. For, thirdly, what Robespierre on December 5 gives as the 'substance' of his remarks on April 3 may have been what he meant by them, but could not possibly have been gathered from his actual words. His audience might have thought he doubted the appropriateness of *panthéonisation*: they could not have supposed he disapproved of Mirabeau himself. It is therefore very difficult to accept as anything but an afterthought the apologia of December 5—'I feel remorse to-day for the first time in my life; for I may have let it be believed that I

¹*Révolutions de Paris*.

shared the good opinion of Mirabeau held by the Assembly, and by the general public'. Even supposing this true, what a paltry fault it was to need expiating by the whole of Robespierre's political life and sufferings! Would it not have been more honest to say, as Marat did, what he really thought about Mirabeau; or more dignified to admit that he had been mistaken about him, and had now changed his mind?

III

Having thus, under Robespierre's guidance, disowned allegiance to their Moderate past, and renounced all claims to earthly rewards, the Jacobins turned to face the next great issue—their struggle with the Girondins over the fate of the king.

France had now been at war for the better part of a year, and was beginning to feel the strain. The luxury trades had failed, owing to the emigration of the rich nobility, and Paris was full of unemployed artisans and domestic servants. The *assignats*—the paper currency based on nationalized church property—were already depreciating, with benefit to none but land-purchasers; whilst the level of wages failed to rise with that of food prices. Partly because the farmers would not sell it for *assignats*, and partly because it was diverted for the use of the army, flour was expensive, and the poor began to go short of bread. Soon there were demands, backed by disorderly demonstrations, for the punishment of speculators and profiteers, and for the regulation of food-prices. During the harvest season local authorities took matters into their own hands, requisitioning supplies from the markets, and commandeering labour to get in the crops. As autumn passed into winter, all these conditions were aggravated, especially in the larger towns, and many riots occurred, ending in the pillaging of shops, or the forcible fixing of prices. Nor were conditions much better in the country-side, where increasing discontent was caused by the shortage of priests and the closing of churches under the Civil Constitution of the Clergy; accompanied,

in many districts; by disturbing relics, or it might be, a recrudescence, of royalism.

Preoccupied by the war, by the elections, and by their attempt to crush the Paris Commune, the Girondist majority had hitherto failed to cope with this tangled situation, and would soon be quite unable to do so. It was the moment for a new party, for a strong and comprehensive policy. The Jacobin leaders were not likely to miss their opportunity; and on December 1 Robespierre delivered an elaborate *Discours sur les subsistances*, in which he declared for a policy of regulating the supply of flour by demanding returns of stocks, forcing local sales, and prohibiting speculation. His speech was well received, and he was invited to draft a decree against *le monopole*, or the wheat-corner. That Robespierre should have been so strong for regulation shows how little he was, by this time, a slave to the principle of liberty, when it conflicted with a party programme, and how nicely he could discriminate, like his master Rousseau, between the poetry and the prose of politics. It is interesting, too, to find him differing fundamentally from his young friend (and some would say, his mentor) Saint-Just. For Saint-Just, only three days before, had declared for non-intervention: leave matters alone, he had said, and the flour shortage would remedy itself by the law of supply and demand.¹ Robespierre saw further. He argued that nature had done her part, by producing an unusually good harvest, and that, if there was still want, it must be due to artificial causes. It was useless—he had always maintained this—to enforce liberty, where the motives for it were absent; and it would be folly to allow it, where its results were manifestly unjust. Speculation in food-supplies seemed to him nothing less than brigandage and fratricide. To allow it would be to put individual liberty—the right to exploit private property—above public liberty—the people's right to live. In physiological metaphor, 'food-supplies are the blood in the veins of the people, and their free circulation is as necessary for the health of the body politic as that of blood for the human

¹Mathiez, *La vie Chère*, 107.

frame'. If the free flow is interrupted, the obstructions, at whatever cost, must be removed.

IV

Here was one side of the new policy. The other was announced two days later, in Robespierre's first speech on the question of the king's trial. This was a matter which the Girondins had obviously mismanaged. Two months before (October 10) Robespierre's own Section had published a manifesto protesting against a Girondist suggestion that they had designs on the Temple, but saying that they and other Sections were waiting anxiously for the king's trial. Instead of meeting these demands, the government had obstructed all attempts to satisfy them. Valazé's Report of November 6, and Buzot's speech on November 13, had merely postponed the issue. But the discovery of the 'iron safe' (November 20), with its compromising correspondence, made further delay impossible. On the 21st an impartial committee was appointed to report on the papers. On December 2, delegates from the Sections called for immediate action. On the 3rd Barbaroux, for the Girondins, proposed that Louis should stand his trial.

This was Robespierre's opportunity. He opened his speech (December 3) with a declaration which went straight to the realities of the question. 'This is no question of a trial', he said; 'Louis is not a defendant; you are not judges. You are not, and cannot be, anything but statesmen, and the people's representatives. You have not to give a verdict for or against an individual, but to adopt a measure of public safety, to safeguard the future of the nation' (*un acte de providence nationale à exercer*). A dethroned king is a lasting menace to a republican government: if anything can make him more dangerous, it is to waste time discussing your competence, or his fate. Louis cannot be tried, for he has already been tried and convicted by the institution of the Republic: even his crimes are, from this point of view, irrelevant. There is no constitution, no law, no pact to

which he can appeal. An insurrection such as that of August 10 leaves nothing standing but the law of nature, and the safety of the people. 'The king's trial is involved in the insurrection; the overthrow of his power is a verdict against him; his sentence is such as is required for the liberty of his people'. There follows a passage which might serve for the self-examination of any Terrorist: 'If we fall back upon questions of form, it is because we have no principles: if we make a point of scruples (*délicatesse*), it is because we lack energy: we make a show of humanity only because we are not really humane: we reverence the shadow of a king only because we have not learnt to respect the people: and if we have a soft spot for our oppressors, it is only because we have no pity for the oppressed'. It was particularly dangerous, he thought, to talk of leniency towards Louis at a moment when royalism was reviving in the country; and quite futile to appeal to constitutional safeguards, now that the Constitution itself had been abolished. No: the Convention must face facts, and do something to justify its high calling. 'We talk of a republic, and Louis is still alive! We talk of a republic, and the person of the king still stands between us and liberty! There is fear that our very scruples may lead us into crime; that, if we show too much kindness to the criminal, we may put ourselves in the dock'.

This is strong enough; nor is it weakened by the personal reflexions which follow. 'For my own part', resumes Robespierre, 'I detest the death penalty that your law prescribes so freely: in the assembly that you still call "Constituent" I moved for its abolition; and it was not my fault if that assembly regarded the first principles of reason as moral and political heresies. But now you propose to set aside the death penalty in the case of the one man whose death could justify it. I agree, the death penalty is, in general, a crime; and that, for the very reason that it can only be justified where it is necessary for the safety of individuals, or of the body politic. But where you have a dethroned king at the heart of a revolution which is entirely

held together by just laws—a king whose very name brings the scourge of civil war upon a distracted nation; in such an event neither imprisonment nor exile can prevent his presence affecting the public welfare; and if justice, in his case, admits this cruel exception to the ordinary law, it is simply the punishment of his crimes. Such is the fatal conclusion which, however much I regret it, I cannot avoid. Because the country must live, Louis must die'. And he ends by proposing that, whilst the Queen and her accomplices are brought to trial, and the Dauphin is imprisoned in the Temple till the end of the war, Louis shall at once be declared 'a traitor towards the French nation, and a public criminal'; that he shall be executed on the spot where the 'generous martyrs of liberty' fell on August 10; and that the event shall be commemorated by a monument 'which will keep alive in the heart of every people consciousness of its rights, and detestation of tyrants, and in the heart of tyrants a salutary fear of the justice of the people'.

If Robespierre had never spoken again, this speech would prove him a great orator, for its clarity, its energy, its stark common sense. Here, at any rate, he sees his way clearly, has settled with his conscience, and feels a party behind him. The historian cannot ignore the long debates that followed; but they added nothing to this first plain statement of the case; and the ultimate decision was almost exactly that to which Robespierre pointed from the first.

The Girondins were quick to see the danger. Repeated attempts were made, on the following days, to prevent Robespierre from speaking again. When he could obtain a hearing, it was to reiterate that 'as a matter of principle, and as a corollary of August 10, the king should be condemned out of hand'. His last word was the same as his first.¹

V

The party struggle continued throughout December, both in the Assembly, and, with added virulence, at the club. On the 7th, at the Jacobins, Robespierre delivered an

¹v. the *Moniteur's* account of the debates of December 3-4.

attack on the Girondist majority in the Convention. It had done nothing, he said, for the people, whilst it was stirring up the provinces against Paris, and putting obstacles in the way of the king's trial. What was the remedy? Not, at the moment, violence; for, 'though insurrection is the most sacred of all duties', there must be no repetition of August 10, or even of July 17. But the public must be enlightened, and deputies must not allow themselves to be silenced. 'So let us all take an oath', he concludes, 'to die in the tribune, rather than to yield our place, when they would refuse us a hearing.' This melodramatic proposal was greeted with applause, and a dozen deputies declared that the next time Robespierre was refused a hearing, they would perish at his side. But the practical Legendre suggested that the best way to further their ends was for members to be at the Assembly earlier in the morning; 'for it is noticeable that the deputies of the Right are already in their places, ready for any intrigue, at a time when the patriots' seats are still empty'.

It is remarkable that, at a moment when party passion was running so high, Robespierre should have intervened against one Achille Viard, who had accused Roland of treacherous correspondence with *émigrés* in England (December 7). Was his refusal to back such a damaging charge due to generosity, or to caution? Or are we to infer from the fact that, as Viard was taken off to prison, 'he smiled, and saluted Robespierre', that the scene had been prearranged?

At any rate there was no slackening of the offensive against Roland's party during the days that followed; and on the 12th we find Robespierre, at the Jacobins, denouncing Roland himself as the ringleader of an attempt to destroy the club, and its affiliated societies. It was at the same meeting that, 'remembering (as he said) how he had learnt at College that there were two ways of educating the mind—first by reading good books, and secondly by reading bad ones', Robespierre suggested that the club should open its daily meetings with readings from the two worst papers

in Paris—the Girondist *Patriote français* and *Chronique de Paris*. Condorcet's reports of the debates in the Assembly, were likely, he thought, to prove specially entertaining. The proposal was adopted.

Next day, in the Assembly, an incident occurred which revived the quarrel between the Convention and the Commune, and illustrated the temper in which the king's trial was likely to be conducted. A deputation from the General Council requested the Assembly to order that when Louis' counsel, de Sèze, went to visit him in the Temple, he should be rigorously searched (*jusques dans les endroits les plus secrets*), for fear that he might become a channel of treacherous correspondence. This ungenerous proposal was much resented by the House, but was defended by Robespierre, on the ground that there were plots afoot to save the king, and that they must not put difficulties in the way of the Commune in dealing with 'this criminal, whom you owe it to the nation to bring to justice as promptly as possible'. At this there were cheers from the gallery, which the President rebuked as 'the vociferations of cannibals'; and the question was allowed to drop. On the 14th it was alleged that Roland had circulated a mutilated and misleading version of Robespierre's speech on the king's trial. On the 16th indignation was caused by the receipt of an address from a provincial club asking for the expulsion of Marat and Robespierre, and by a Girondist attempt to divert attention from the king by proposing the exile of citizen Égalité, as the Duc d'Orléans had recently styled himself. A general expatriation of the royal family was, indeed, a measure which Robespierre himself had in mind: they could live in England, he thought, at the expense of the nation. But the expulsion of Orléans, the least suspect of them all, might lead to that of real patriots. Had he not himself been threatened with ostracism? Three days later he designated all such proposals as a Girondist plot. When he went on to complain of attacks against himself, Mazuyer threatened to denounce him. 'I have the proofs,' he said, 'here in my hand'.

One upshot of these charges and counter-charges was a curious debate at the club (December 23) on the relative merits of Marat and Robespierre. 'Robespierre', said Robert, 'is prudent and moderate in his methods; Marat is exaggerated, and has none of Robespierre's prudence. Patriotism is not enough (*Il ne suffit pas d'être patriote*). To be of real service to the people, one must be cautious in the means used to achieve one's ends; and in this Robespierre is obviously superior to Marat': and he suggested that an expression of this opinion should be circulated to the affiliated societies. Dufourny, on the other hand, urged that Marat was one of those men of robust mind (*têtes fortes*) specially needed in a time of Revolution. The club finally decided to send out a circular 'in which a detailed account should be given of the points of likeness and unlikeness, of agreement and disagreement', between the two men, so that good Jacobins might be able to 'separate two names which they are wrong in thinking ought always to be coupled together'.

Looking back, one can agree that the caution spoken of in this debate had really been characteristic of Robespierre's policy, even in its most violent manifestations. He would state as strongly as possible the Jacobin demand for the trial, conviction, and execution of the king. He would denounce at every turn the attempts of the Gironde to evade the issue. But he would allow no attack on the Convention—the embodied will of the people; and he would avoid any demonstration or disorder that might revive memories of the republican manifesto of July 17, or of the Insurrectional Commune of August 10. There must be no excuse for anti-democratic reprisals. In this he was very wise. The party issue was still in doubt, and some good observers confidently predicted a victory for the Gironde. 'Robespierre's party is still strong', wrote the British ambassador on December 17, 'but Roland's is strengthening with Brissot's, and Pétion within these few days has considerably altered his tone . . . Roland and Brissot's party are certainly struggling to save the king,

in order to humble Robespierre's party, and I myself, from everything I can learn, have not the smallest doubt but they will succeed'.¹ In reality, time was on Robespierre's side. Every delay and evasion of the issue increased the popular demand for the trial, and transferred votes from the Girondins to the Jacobins.

VI

By the third week in December no further device could postpone the trial. The official indictment had been before the Convention since December 10. Louis had been questioned on the 11th. The sequel could be no longer delayed. On the 26th de Sèze spoke for the defence, alleging the irregularity of the proceedings, and relying on the king's answers to the charges brought against him, his personal virtues, and the benefits of the earlier part of his reign. Thereafter the whole issue was opened to discussion, and an interminable debate dragged on till January 14. There were three main issues: Was the king guilty? How should he be punished? And, should there be an appeal from the Convention to the people? The first was not seriously in doubt. The second gave rise to various proposals for imprisonment or banishment which were more creditable to the hearts of those who supported them than to their heads; for Louis alive, whether in or out of France, would remain a centre of royalist intrigue. The third was the chief refuge of those who shrank from the logical result of Louis' treachery. It found some support in the inviolability of the king's person, at the time when his alleged crimes were committed, under the Constitution of 1791—an inviolability which, perhaps, could only be revoked by an appeal to the people; and it embodied a hope that the Conservative and royalist instincts still alive in the country-side might save the king's life. The only other hope—and that a forlorn one—lay in foreign intervention.

Such were the circumstances under which Robespierre

¹Gower, 258.

delivered his second speech on the king's trial (December 28). He began by repeating the main theme of his speech of December 3: Louis had been tried and condemned already, by the national rising of August 10: it only remained to pass the sentence due to his crimes. But this, he continued, must be done at once. Delay saved Louis after Varennes, and caused the massacre of the Champ de Mars: delay might save him now, and lead to civil war. This (he continues) is the chief argument against an appeal to the people. But there is another. Such an appeal would involve a controversy, in every constituency in the country, in which royalists as well as republicans would have their say, and would be given a fresh opportunity to divide and destroy the people. 'In this so-called appeal to the people, I see nothing but an appeal from what the people has willed and done (on August 10) to those secret enemies of equality whose corruption and cowardice were the very cause of that insurrection'. No, he concludes; the nation has already spoken, by the act of deposing the king: let the Convention, as its representative, finish its work. He ends with an appeal to the independent members whose votes, he knows, will ultimately determine the issue. The so-called majority, he says, meaning the Girondins, has claimed to silence the minority (the Jacobins). 'But the only real majority here is that of good citizens. It is not a permanent body, because it belongs to no party: it changes its composition every time it gives a free vote, because its allegiance is to eternal reason and the common weal: and when, as sometimes happens, the Assembly realizes that it has made a mistake, the minority becomes a majority. For every minority has the inalienable right of uttering the voice of truth. Virtue too (he thinks) has always been in a minority here on earth', and has always suffered at the hands of successful vice. But there will always be some who prefer the fate of Sydney or Hampden,¹ of Cato or Socrates, to the prosperity of a Critias, an Anitus, a Caesar, or a Clodius; 'and if there were only fifty such in France, the thought of them would be

¹*Ils expirèrent sur l'échafaud*, he says, not very exactly.

enough to intimidate the cowardly intriguers who seek to mislead the majority'.

If the reader is looking for an impartial discussion of the issues raised by the king's trial, he will not find it in this speech. Robespierre's way of regarding the plebiscite is, in itself, sufficient to show how partisan is his outlook: his real reason for opposing it is that it would give the Girondins an opportunity to express their views, and to out-vote the Jacobins.¹ But his partisanship is only another phase of his constitutionalism. He may seem to be putting a parliamentary victory before a verdict of the people; but this is because the Convention embodies the will of the Sovereign People. He works for a majority vote in the House; because the only alternative is a fresh insurrection. And he is shrewd enough to know that another August 10 might go against him.

The speech was so much admired that, two days later, at the Jacobins, the ordinary business of the day was suspended, the orators who had put down their names to speak gave way, and the deputations waiting to be heard were shown the door, whilst Robespierre mounted the tribune, and, amid a silence of deep attention, read it all through again. A subscription was opened to print it, and an affiliated member offered to carry copies round the provinces, expounding it as he went. When Robespierre reproduced it in his journal, he appended the hostile criticisms of Brissot and Gorsas. He could afford to. It had demolished their case.

Nevertheless the struggle was not over. Owing to further evasions by the *Brissotins*, it was not till January 14 that a vote could be taken. Meanwhile Robespierre, in face of fresh attacks by his opponents², advises his supporters (January 1) to keep calm, and to avoid provocation. 'If any agitator tries to rouse the people against that automaton (*machine inerte*) at the Temple', they should arrest him, and

¹'A majority of the Convention', wrote Gower on December 31, 'is clearly for sparing his (the king's) life, and should it be referred to the Departments, most of them are decidedly in his favour' (270).

²Daubarf, *Paris en 1793*, 10, 12; B. and R. 22/298; Ward, 205.

have him tried. A week later, the strength of the Girondist influence in the provinces could be gauged by the number of addresses which reached the Jacobins from their affiliated societies, protesting against the attitude of Marat and Robespierre, and sometimes demanding their expulsion from the club. La Faye suggested an address to the Departments, answering these charges. 'You call us disorganizers',¹ he would say: 'yes, we are; for we shall always regard it as our duty to disorganize despotism. . . . As for Robespierre, he shall remain a member of the society; for he has always been a champion of principles, a friend of the people, and of mankind. Nor shall we exclude Marat. We do not approve of all he says; but it needs something more than fine phrases to destroy aristocrats'.

VII

On the day that the bulk of these addresses reached the club, the *Brissotins* made their last effort in the Assembly. It took the form of a motion to abolish the 'permanence' of the Paris Sections, and so to destroy the chief support of the Jacobin party. After Salles had led the attack, Robespierre obtained possession of the tribune; but the encouragements of his followers were drowned by *Brissotin* cries of 'Order! Censure him! Lynch him!' (*à l'Abbaye!*); and soon the hall 'echoed from end to end' (it is the official account) with 'violent remarks, sarcasms, and the noise of personal altercations'. A protest against the refusal to hear Roland, 'that honest Minister whom all France reveres', was drowned by the laughter of sixty members at one end of the room; but when Robespierre tried to resume, he was met with cries of *Le scélérat*, and *Le factieux et l'impudent calomniateur!* 'He thinks it's September 2; he wants to be a dictator!' shouted Baraillon; and Chambon, 'We're not afraid of your assassins, Robespierre!' Marat's 'unacademic phrases', beginning with *f . . . or g . . .*, and ending in dots, increased the uproar. The President rang his bell till it broke in his hands; then, as a last resort, put on his hat, and sent the ushers round to

¹*Désorganisateurs*: one of the earliest uses of what became a popular term of abuse.

announce the suspension of the meeting. Gradually order was restored, the members resumed their seats, and removed their hats, and the President censured Robespierre, the Assembly, and the public in the galleries, indiscriminately.¹ When at last he was allowed to go on with his speech, Robespierre used the opportunity to sneer at 'the virtuous Roland', as one who 'is always praising himself and his friends as models of virtue, and depicting his enemies as rascals, brigands, disorganizers, and factionists', and to accuse him of being in the pay of the bankers of London and Berlin.

It needs the blind partisanship of a Hamel to find all the fault in this scene on one side, and to characterize Robespierre's attack on Roland as couched in 'dignified and serious terms, beneath which could be traced an involuntary resentment due to a series of gratuitous insults'. An impartial reader will contrast Robespierre's demand for calm on the part of his followers with his own display of temper in the Assembly. The only defence, for what it is worth, is that Robespierre's sensitiveness made him an easy prey for political pin-prickers; and that, if he had remained silent under such attacks, it would have been interpreted, not as strength, but as weakness. Things had reached such a pass that it might really seem as though the rise and fall of personal reputations had more effect on the course of the Revolution than the serious weighing of arguments. Yet, even on the score of reputation, there was food for reflexion in the remark of an anonymous member, at the end of this debate. 'The Departments (he said) will be interested to hear that Robespierre has insulted the Minister and the President, and has been thrice called to order'.

VIII

On January 14 the final stage of the king's trial at last began. Three divisions had to be taken: first, was Louis

¹Gower, writing on Jan. 7, speaks of the 'shameful heights' to which the debates in the Assembly are being carried. 'It far surpasses,' he says, 'any country cock-match' (273).

guilty? secondly, should there be a plebiscite? and thirdly, how should he be punished? To these there was eventually added a fourth: should the execution of sentence be postponed? In each division every one of the 700 deputies gave his decision separately by word of mouth, and could speak as long as he liked in explanation of his vote. It was not surprising that the proceedings lasted for nearly a week.

On the 14th the king was declared guilty by a unanimous vote, except for a few abstentions. On the 15th the proposal for a plebiscite was defeated by 424 votes to 287; and Robespierre's name headed the list of twelve deputies for the Department of Paris, all of whom voted *Non*, without troubling to give their reasons. On the 16th came the crucial division, on the sentence. This time Robespierre gave reasons for his vote in a speech which occupies more than half a column in the *Moniteur*. He cannot convict Louis, he says, and then not sentence him. He cannot agree to the punishment of the king's accomplices, and not of the king himself. He must be pitiless towards oppressors, because he feels pity for the oppressed; and he gives his vote, unconditionally, for the king's execution. In the end, 361 votes were cast in this sense, and 334 for detention, imprisonment in chains, or death under certain conditions. There remained twenty-six deputies who voted for death, but who wished that the question of reprieve should be considered: as, however, they did not wish their vote to be dependent upon this reservation, these twenty-six went to increase the votes for death to 387—a total definitely larger than the 361 required to give an absolute majority of those present and voting. On the following day, but before the result of the division (which had gone on all night) was known, a letter was received from the king's counsel, asking that they might be heard again. They doubtless hoped that a last-minute appeal might secure the sentence of banishment which Louis himself expected.¹ Robespierre opposed this request. They must abide, he said, by the issue

¹He intended to go to Switzerland, said de Sèze afterwards (R.H.R.F. 13/160).

of the vote, whatever it might be, and not admit any fresh considerations. Neither they nor he would have acted thus, one supposes, unless it had been still uncertain which way the voting would go.

When at last the figures were known, and the President declared that the sentence of the House was death, the king's defenders were allowed to speak, and 'admitted to the honours of the meeting'. Then Robespierre spoke again (January 17). He hoped that the attempt to secure a revision of the death sentence would not be carried beyond the House. The Assembly could not go back upon its decision without endangering the whole country. 'The nation', he said, 'has condemned the king who oppressed it, not simply to execute a notable act of vengeance, but to set a great example to the world; not only to confirm liberty in France, but also to evoke it in Europe'.

The only hope for the king now lay in a reprieve (*sursis*)—an indefinite postponement of the execution. This was proposed by the Girondist leaders on January 18, and debated until the evening of the 19th.

Robespierre, increasingly anxious that no last-minute scruples should deprive the Jacobins of their victory, intervened three times on the 18th—first, to persuade Thuriot to declare against a reprieve, and to back Tallien's demand for an immediate vote; next, to suggest that the division should be taken not later than 4 a.m. on the 19th, so that the execution could still be carried out within twenty-four hours of the sentence, as prescribed by law; and thirdly (when it was clear that this could not be done) to urge that precautions should be taken against any attempt to rescue the king on the way to the scaffold. At this moment Santerre, the Commandant of the National Guard, entered the hall, to assure the House that everything was quiet, and that nothing would prevent the execution. He had a force of 5,000 men in reserve, and cannon everywhere; but they would not be needed.

The final division was at last taken on the night of the 19th, and Robespierre again headed the great majority of

the Paris deputies in voting against the reprieve; it was rejected by 380 votes to 310.

IX

It is difficult to suppose that there can ever have been much fear of a successful attempt to rescue the king, though the Jacobin club, on the evening of January 20, was full of rumours,¹ and Robespierre thought it necessary to counsel 'a calm demeanour, so dignified and formidable that it will freeze with fear the enemies of freedom'. Any sympathy with royalism that still survived was effectively quenched by the murder, on the morning of the 21st, of the Jacobin Le Pelletier de Saint-Fargeau—by mistake, it was said, for the Duc d'Orléans²—by one Paris, formerly a member of the king's bodyguard.

At daybreak the city gates were closed. At ten o'clock the royal carriage left the Temple, and passed slowly along the Boulevard³ to the Place de la Révolution, surrounded by troops of the National Guard. At 10.30, amidst the rolling of Santerre's drums, and before the eyes of a vast, indifferent crowd, the king's head fell into the basket of the guillotine. The city gates were opened again, and the life of Paris resumed its ordinary course.

Among those whose minds were fixed steadily on this end, there was one more certain and active than the rest. If Louis' death was any one man's work, it was Robespierre's. Yet his fixity of purpose was not simply his own: it was that of his party, and of Paris. To the people of Paris, Louis was, as Robespierre had said, not a man on trial, but a criminal already condemned. If he were not legally executed by the Convention, he might be lynched by the mob; and no one

¹An eloquent appeal to the people to invade the Temple, and rescue the king, was widely distributed in Paris on the afternoon of the 20th (Brit. Mus. R. 525). Devaux's trial (June 13, 1794) revealed evidence of de Batz's plan to save the king. (Fletcher, Carlyle, 2/397.)

²Dauban, *Paris en 1793*, 27. Rétif (*Nuits révolutionnaires*, 128) says that much more interest was taken in his death than in that of the king.

³Not by the rue Saint-Honoré; so the story that Robespierre had the door of No. 366 shut whilst the King passed cannot be true.

desired another September 2. Nor was this all. Behind Robespierre was Paris: behind Paris was France. True, no group of deputies voted so solidly for the king's death as that representing the capital. True, there was in the whole House a bare majority for execution. But there is good reason to think that, just as fear made some of the 380 regicides, so it was not royalism which inspired the 330 provincials to vote against death, but rather dread of responsibility (and perhaps, some day, reprisals) for so momentous an act, and dislike of the domination of Paris. The Revolution is hardly intelligible except on the assumption that France—as a whole—that is, the vast majority of those who stood by the New Order begun in 1789—had persuaded themselves that Louis was a 'tyrant', and were (at the lowest) indifferent to his death.¹ In so far as he had read the national mind, and translated it into action, Robespierre had shown himself a statesman. His policy was true to the main trend of the Revolution. His instinct was right, when he made the king's death a party issue, and acceptance of it a touchstone of patriotism. Those who passed the test also entered a blood-covenant, which pledged them, as never before, to the defence of the republic. The king's head, as Danton declared, was thrown down as a challenge to all the sovereigns of Europe. Louis' execution was not only the logical solution of a very difficult problem: it was also a gesture, like the Declaration of Rights, or the demolition of the Bastille, whose significance went far beyond any immediate results that might be expected of it.

Nevertheless it was a pity that Louis had ever been brought back from Varennes; for June 21 made January 21 inevitable. The best commentary was that of a woman who wrote offering to defend Louis: 'You do not kill a king by cutting off his head, but by letting him live when he has lost his throne'.²

¹Indifference perhaps explains the fact that the king's head still appeared on coins struck during the early months of 1793 in Paris, Metz, Strasbourg, Lyon, and Bordeaux (R.F. 59/470).

²Montgaillard, *Revue chronologique*, etc., 2/301.

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